

Thoughts in the Time of COVID-19—#9, April 3, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

Does it feel like it's been a long time? When we are happy, time seems to pass quickly and we wish the experience would last longer. When we are unhappy, that experience can seem to drag on forever. Many people are wondering how long this "new normal" of physical distancing and restrictions on gathering with others will last? Already, it feels like a long time.

In your reading of the Bible or hearing the readings in church, have you ever noticed that Moses and the Israelites wandered for forty years in the desert before entering the Promised Land? The number forty is significant in scripture because it meant "a long time." Some have offered a tongue-in-cheek explanation that it took forty years to reach their destination because Moses was a man and when he got lost, he was too proud to ask for directions. The real explanation is more significant.

The Israelites had lived in captivity oppressed by their neighbours for a long time. The dominant culture in which they lived eroded the sense of their own identity and religious faith. Part of the process of liberation from captivity was the time it took them to unlearn the things they had knowingly or unconsciously absorbed in Egypt. And that they had taken on the mindset that they were slaves of Pharaoh.

During the journey through the desert, they had to learn again that their faith was in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They had to rediscover their core identity and their faith. This very process took a long time—forty years—a period that probably felt like it would last forever. But that extended time helped prepare the children of the wilderness generation to enter the Promise Land with a renewed spirit, a rediscovered faith.

Our Lenten journey of forty days this year has been unprecedented. Many people have written or called to tell me how much they miss being able to go to their parish church for Mass, how they long for the Eucharist and to see their friends. This Lent has been a time of suffering and privation in much of the world, as we see on the news virtually all day long. At this point, we have only a bit more than a week left in Lent, but are faced with a yet undetermined time left in the countrywide effort to limit the spread of the Corona virus.

The Israelites gradually came to know they were on a journey towards a new beginning. They sometimes strayed from the path but they had a destination, a goal to reach—the earthly Promised Land of milk and honey pledged to them by God.

It is important for us to live with a goal in mind. We are heading to the eternal Promised Land! We can choose to journey towards that goal with a spirit of hope. For we know that Lent will culminate in the mystery of Easter when we celebrate Christ rising from the dead, bringing life to us and freeing us from the burden of sin and death.

So too, we will come through this pandemic as well on the journey to a restored home. Each act of kindness reaching out to others, each offer to shop for an elderly neighbour, each rosary prayed and Mass watched online or on TV in a spirit of prayer is a concrete act of hope in God's saving and renewing power.

We may be on a long journey this Lent but we can engage in it as a time of reflection and renewal on our ultimate journey home to God. May we see in this time of suffering and difficulty a time to renew our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, to entrust our country and world to the Blessed Mother Mary and to commit to being God's agents of mercy, faith, and hope to the world.

God bless you.

✠Terrence