

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last month a friend of mine texted a small rectangular sign to me that read: *I guess God got so mad about all of our fighting down here that He sent us all to our rooms.*

I liked it and thought it was funny and I began to think about it again today. To be sure, many people are working harder than ever; think of all our first responders, medical and nursing home staff, grocery store employees and others whose essential services we all count on to live. I remember them at prayer during my Masses each day.

For others, the usual pace of daily life has been interrupted or curtailed and they find themselves with time to reflect, to pray, to do penance and to thank God for their lives and their blessings. Others may waste the gift of time and not know what they had 'til it's gone, or even then.

I remember watching a 2009 BBC production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* featuring Ellie Kendrick in the title role of Anne and Felicity Jones as Anne's sister Margot. Most everyone knows the story of the eight people who went into hiding to escape arrest.

As the four part series unfolds, the gravity of the world at war, the looming holocaust, the sudden arrests, betrayals, deportations and food shortages bear increasingly on the eight inhabitants of what Anne called the hidiers' *Achterhuis*, their *Secret Annex*. The psychological, emotional, and physical strain of all these things took their on Anne and her companions, and all of them said and did things they may have wished they hadn't said or done. We all know what that feels like.

Think of the people you live with now, and work with, if you are still working. As the dread of Covid-19 becomes stronger, the strain on us all increases and we may say things we'll later regret. But how often does this happen in our parish or households anyway? We knew how to be less understanding of each other, quick to jump, to make rash judgments, and to think or behave uncharitably long before we heard of Covid-19.

What struck me in the Anne Frank series was what happened on August 4, 1944, the day the *Secret Annex* was found and raided. In the five minutes the eight companions were given by the Gestapo to pack their bags, the things they fought and argued about lost their meaning in an instant. They didn't just go away; they lost any meaning, any relevance at all. In their place, beside their common fear, they were overtaken by profound feelings of compassion, empathy, and love.

Only once time in all four Gospels does our Lord explicitly asks us to learn from Him, and we find that one incident in Matthew 11:29: *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* Our Lord wants all of us to be meek and humble.

Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, a Carmelite priest, has spoken well of the virtue of meekness in *Divine Intimacy*, a book I've meditated on for decades. Father never wrote the book; it was compiled by some Carmelite sisters from retreat conferences that the saintly priest

had given them over a number of years. I think Father's insights about the virtue of meekness might be solid food for our souls just now and so I share them with you here.

*Our interior soul knows very well that everything that happens to us, however painful, is permitted by God for our sanctification; yet in moments of rising anger, this thought vanishes and we no longer see anything but the creature which has injured us and against which we wish to react. If we wish our life to remain always under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, our actions to be always directed by grace and conformed to God's will, we should never permit ourselves to yield to the impulses of anger, not even under the pretext of good. Rather, in these moments we should use our energy to suspend every judgment and every act, striving to reestablish in our heart the peace necessary to judge things in the light of God (Divine Intimacy, pp. 890-891).*

To be sure, God is permitting Covid-19 to afflict the whole world now. Why He is doing so I will not venture to say, because I don't know, and who am I to speculate? What I do know, is that my response to His Hidden Counsels must surely be certain in faith, abounding in hope, strong in love, and wrapped in a mantle of meekness.

I *am* missing you now. Through the intercession of Our Lady and Saint William of York, may God bless you and keep you. Now I send you my blessing through the air.

With kindest regards and prayers for you each day, I remain

Your grateful pastor,

Father DeMartino