

April 24, 2020

Yesterday, during my Holy Hour, the first reading from "The Office of Readings" was taken from "The Book of Revelation, Chapter 3," an always compelling read, but an especially timely one now. Verse 19, when I came to it, arrested my attention immediately:

"Those whom I love, I reprove and chastise. Be earnest, therefore, and repent."

"Those whom I love." Though, like the Cross, we often fail to discern it as such, one of the ways we come to know God's love for us is through the reproofs that He gives us over the course of our lives. Because we are as we are, wounded by original sin and motivated by many selfish concerns, we often don't understand or receive reproofs well. I recalled one of those reproofs in my life when I read Revelation 3:19 yesterday and immediately related it to something I told you in my letter of Wednesday, April 22.

In that letter I told you that "I should not be beseeching our Lord to end this pandemic soon, not that it would be wrong for you to pray for it to end." I went on to say that "I, in particular, should not beseech Him to end it" and "that He *expected me* to trust Him with that decision." Why did I say that? That's what I want to try to explain to you today.

Every disciple of Jesus, every child of God, born again in the Spirit, will necessarily have his or her own unique relationship with the Triune God, while still bearing what we might call a family resemblance. That personal relationship will have dynamics of growth and intimacy that are unique to the relationship. Pair any two saints, however similar, and you will see their resemblance to our Lord and to each other as well as the character marks of demarcation that distinguish them.

To be sure, the Gospels clearly encourage us to pray for what we perceive to be the good. Jesus, Himself, tells us to. In Mark 11:24, He says, "Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours." At the same time we could put our desires to one side. We could decide to leave all of our affairs to Him, contenting ourselves with the Prayer of Pope Clement: "I want whatever you want, I want because you want, I want as you want, I want as long as you want." For a long time now Jesus has been directing me to abandon myself to His Father's will for me, just as he Himself did when He lived His life on earth. After all, He is the Master.

Just the other day I came upon these words of Saint Therese of Lisieux that Jesus has used time and time again to instruct me in His way for me: "And now I have no other desire except to love Jesus unto folly.... Now abandonment alone guides me. I have no other compass! I can no longer ask for anything with *fervor* except the accomplishment of God's will in my soul...." (The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, 178).

Besides the good example of Therese and of other saints, and the teachings of the priests I have been quoting from over the course of my letters, Jesus has also taught me to want His Father's

will alone through the reproofs He has given me throughout my life. Yesterday, when I read Revelation 3:19 again, I remembered one particular reproof.

It once happened that I was unhappy in an assignment. Providentially, I learned one day about an opening that was going to appear in the next round of annual transfers. I thought that assignment would be ideal for me. I told no one about it, but the more I thought about it, the more I believed that it would be good for me. Soon it was not hard for me to imagine that Jesus had wonderfully arranged for me to hear about this opening because it was not common knowledge, nor was it gossip. The priest who would be creating the opening spontaneously turned to me and told me about it himself one Saturday morning while we were standing side by side in a processional line at a parish we were visiting for a Confirmation Mass with Bishop Loverde. I'd never met him before and never saw him after. What made him tell *me* that Saturday morning in March?

Before long, I began to think that this unexpected opening had been especially revealed to me, that Jesus had seen how unhappy I'd become and was preparing "a new way" just for me. Now, I had to pray hard! I came across a novena prayer to Saint Joseph and I prayed it faithfully, like the dickens, before the Blessed Sacrament, sincerely following every direction in the novena.

March turned to April, April turned to May and the time of transfers was imminent. I had a priest friend then from my seminary days and that year he had been stricken with a very strange ailment. We'd once been like brothers but he was drifting away. His illness was effecting him more deeply than I may have realized, more deeply than anyone may have realized. I was desperately trying to help him and had been for a while. Then, one day at prayer I began to sense, and I don't know how or why, that my friend was going to get the assignment that I was praying Jesus would give *me*. My heart sank. Somehow I felt sure of it, though I had no way of knowing it at all. And I was right.

I was right. My friend got the assignment I thought Jesus was preparing for me. I still remember watching my brother priests gathered around him at the conclusion of the Priesthood Ordination Mass, when assignments were made public, like reporters vying for a scoop, eagerly asking him about the assignment, and my friend, like a sudden winner, turning first to one priest and then to another with telling details about the assignment.

I felt conflicted, confused, and rejected. I did not understand. What came next was even harder to grasp. Like a slap on the hand I felt the reproof and chastisement of Jesus: firm, sudden, and to the point, and I could almost hear Him, Whom I had prayed to with so much hope and *fervor*, telling me, "Don't you ever do that again."

Remembering that day now brings to mind a scene in the last chapter of Saint John's Gospel. At breakfast on the beach with His disciples, Jesus took Peter aside to tell him what He demanded of him, presently and in the future. For the second time Peter listened to Jesus speak of future events that he didn't want to hear about, and in verse 21, seeing John nearby, said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" In verse 22, Jesus said to Peter, "What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours?"

“What if I want you to endure your present assignment and choose to give the assignment you prayed for to another, more deserving priest? What concern is it of yours?”

What answer could I possibly offer Jesus? For me there can only be one: I'm sorry, Jesus. I trust in You.

It is almost 7:00 am now and I must finish this letter. I have much to do today, including a wedding, remember? Please know that in my mind and in my heart I will bring all of you with me to my makeshift altar this morning as I privately offer the Mass for today, the Mass for Friday of the Second Week of Easter. Now, with the love of a father, I send you my blessing through the air, remaining always

Your grateful pastor,

Father DeMartino