

CHURCH OF ST. PATRICK

53 ST. PATRICK'S PLACE STATEN ISLAND, NY 10306

April 19, 2020

Dear Parishioner,

Fifty years ago I read a book that was one of my all-time favorites: "Man's Search for Meaning" by Victor Frankl, a doctor who had been an inmate at Auschwitz and at a small camp outside Dachau. He went on to become one of the great psychologists, along with Freud, Jung, and Adler. While I don't intend to recount the experiences of camp life that he portrays in graphic detail, I would like to look at some of his insights which might be relevant to us during this time of confinement. He said that he was aware of:

1. Fear, mainly of death, which expressed itself as loss of control.
2. Detached curiosity: "I wonder how this is going to turn out," as if it were happening to someone else.
3. Fear of the unknown: the prison term was unlimited and the quality of prison life uncertain.
4. Boredom – "Groundhog Day."
5. Deadening loss of feeling – seeing awful things and being numb to them.

"An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal." All these feelings were present at various times throughout his imprisonment, as they were for all the other prisoners. We can certainly identify with them, to a lesser extent, in our situation.

The death rate in the camps was 95% -- only 1 in 20 survived. Frankl tried to examine what the survivors had that the victims didn't. He said:

1. The people that lived had a purpose. There was a meaning in their lives. They took their extremely difficult situation as an opportunity to grow spiritually. "A person who has a WHY to live for can bear almost any HOW."
2. "That which doesn't kill me makes me stronger." As Christians we can say: "Even that which kills me makes me stronger as I move into the incomparable glory of eternal life."
3. They had a religious interest, and would risk their lives gathering in prayer groups in the corner of their barracks.
4. They had a tremendous interest in their families and friends both inside and outside the camp.
5. They received Gifts: of gratitude for small things, appreciation of nature, and even a sense of humor.
6. They were "lucky." So many times they could have been selected to go to the gas chambers but they were not. We would call this "Divine Providence, God's merciful love," not luck.
7. Some were even heroic in the way that they spent most of their time and shared most of their food and showed extraordinary care for the prisoners most in need.

Those that survived were those who rose above their circumstances and became more than they had ever been.

Our greatest presidents were those who successfully took us through the worst problems:

- Washington – the Revolution and the formation of a nation.
- Lincoln – the Civil War and the preservation of the nation.
- Roosevelt (FDR) – the Great Depression and WWII, and the preservation of freedom.

Great suffering and crises produce either leaders who grow to a stature far beyond their former capabilities or who shrink and show themselves even less than they had formerly appeared to be.

This pandemic has shut us up in our homes, separated us from our loved ones, taken our money and our jobs away, and struck us with fear, anger, and uncertainty. But nothing external can separate us from the Love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38). With God's inspiration and strength we can choose the attitudes and actions that we take toward this crisis.

We can become:

1. More spiritual and improve our relationship with God.
2. We can turn to our family and friends and come closer to them – even from a distance.
3. We can reflect on the meaning of our lives. What does God want us to do? What does He want us to become?
4. We can take time to see how God's hand has protected us, guided us, saved us, and healed us all through our lives.
5. We can develop positive life affirming attitudes of gratitude, appreciation of nature, a sense of humor, acceptance, patience, tolerance, and love.

We can come out of this GROWING as individuals and as society. If we can live through 9/11, Sandy, and COVID we can live through anything.

After the death and pain of the pandemic, and even because of it, comes Resurrection. We wait with great anticipation and hope for what God has planned for us after this is over. We wait to see how He will make all things work together for good. I believe He has something BIG in mind.

Hang on. Pray. And Father Victor and I will pray for all of you – until we are together again.

God bless you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrey B. Conway". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, personal style.

Jeff Conway, Pastor

JPC/smb