

CHURCH OF ST. PATRICK

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

May 17, 2020

Dear Parishioner,

It is now two months since our "Stay at Home" order. Masses were discontinued on the weekend of March 14/15. We have been confined to our houses for all this time, enforced confinement, house arrest, an imprisonment of fear. Many of us have alternated between boredom and fear and loneliness and self-pity and anger. But at times we have just accepted our situation and lived one day at a time in peace and serenity. We can't will the pandemic away, but we can be given the grace to make the best of it, to use the opportunity to grow more in the image of Jesus, who endured much more than this for our sakes.

We can devote some of the time on our hands to prayer and develop a stronger relationship with Jesus through prayer. We can pray the prayers that we were taught as children. We can talk to Jesus constantly through the day as our closest companion on the journey through life. We can petition Him for the things that we need for ourselves and others, and thank Him for all the gifts He has given us. We can pray the rosary and meditate on the mysteries of His Life. We can read the scriptures and allow His Word to penetrate to the depths of our souls. All of these prayers involve talking, or thinking, or imagining, or reading – they involve something that We do. We are talking, thinking, imagining, reading – and God is listening. We are active and He is passive in this kind of prayer.

But in any relationship each party must have a chance to act and a chance to be acted upon, to be active and passive, the actor and the recipient. Any prayer where we are the actors and God is the recipient will not be as good as one where God dominates the prayer and we experience the results of His actions. This passive prayer, this prayer of silence in which we put aside all talking, reading, imagining, and thinking, this prayer of quiet is called contemplation. It was considered by the monks to be the highest form of prayer. Beginners at prayer used formal prayers, petition, thanksgiving, various readings, informal prayers, and scripture but as they persisted in prayer they were led deeper into the prayer of contemplation where they observed the command of God to "Be still and know that I am God."

We sometimes call this prayer of contemplation "Centering Prayer." It is suggested that we do it for two periods during the day for 20 minutes each, one in the morning and one later in the day, but not immediately before bedtime. We find a comfortable position. We close our eyes, and we imagine a large screen (our mind) with thoughts running across the screen. We pick out a word that indicates our willingness to pay attention to God, not the other thoughts. It should be an easy, simple, short word, such as "God". We place that word in the center of the screen and place our focus on the word. When our mind

wanders to one of the other thoughts we patiently bring it back to the sacred word. We don't get angry at ourselves when we constantly keep moving our focus to other thoughts. We just patiently go back to the sacred word. We accept the frantic activity of our mind, but we detach from the crazy thoughts and go back to our focus on the word "God." When we are focused on the word and not our other thoughts we let go of the sacred word and have a blank screen. Then there is nothing in the way of God communicating with us; no thought, or word, or imagination, or even feeling. There is nothing of us – so God can fill up this nothingness with Himself. As John the Baptist said: "I must decrease. He must increase."

This prayer awakens us to the presence of God who is around us and in us like the air we breathe. This prayer will energize us because we are getting out of the way and allowing the power that moves the universe to come into us and fill us. After practicing this for a while we will feel tremendous consolation, waves of serenity, peace, and love. God gives a tremendous gift to us if we can get out of the way and let Him come into our lives. Of course, this doesn't usually happen immediately. We may find that we are not able to focus on the sacred word for more than a few seconds at first, but the continuous practice of this prayer will teach us patience, acceptance, detachment, and letting go. We have to trust the process and see that this is where God wants us to go even though it may turn out to be a long road. It will be a worthwhile journey as we allow Him to come closer and closer to us.

As we continue the practice of this prayer God makes us aware of our selfishness, our character defects and our shortcomings and He removes these obstacles to our growth. He removes the psychological blocks that have existed from our childhoods, and at some point all those things that held us back and held us down are gone. We now have interior freedom and God can take us the rest of the way to transformation. "We shall become like Him for we shall see Him as He is (1 Jn 3:2)". "Now we see indistinctly but then we shall see Him face to face. (1 Cor 13:12)."

This Prayer of Quiet can really help us by allowing God to come closer to us, fix us, and transform us into the people that we were always meant to be. Monks in a monastery use this prayer as they progress spirituality. We, in the monasteries of our homes, can try this prayer as another way to improve our relationship with God. We have the time. Why not try it? If you want to know more about this prayer read Thomas Keating's "Open Mind, Open Heart," or Thomas Green's "When the Well Run's Dry," or Basil Pennington's "Centered Living."

May God bless you and Keep you. May He make His Face shine upon you and give you peace.

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, connected style.

Jeff Conway, Pastor

JPC/smb