

CHURCH OF ST. PATRICK

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

May 24, 2020

Dear Parishioner,

When we spend a lot of our time by ourselves we spend a lot of time thinking—and that can be dangerous. We can start to think of all the people who have abandoned, insulted, disrespected, attacked or hurt us in any way. We can go over and over their offenses in our minds, creating scenes where we yell at them, hurt them, and get our revenge against them. We can indulge ourselves again and again with these thoughts, escalating our anger as we fill our minds with even greater bitterness and hatred.

It is amazing to me as I talk to parishioners of St. Patrick's, OLSS, and other parishes in which I have served how many people are estranged from spouses, children, brothers, sisters, parents, and former close friends. They speak about the offense of the person that they cannot forgive, and demand that the offender apologize if there is ever to be any relationship in the future. They claim to be religious, think of themselves as good Catholics, and call for moral reforms in our society without remembering the statements of Jesus: "If you have something against your brother leave your gift at the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother, then come and offer your gift." (Mt 5:23-24). Also: "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do to Me" (Mt 25:40). Mother Theresa put it this way: "We love Jesus as much as the one we hate the most."

This is a special time when we are given the opportunity to deal with our "demons," to get right with others and thereby get right with God. We can't love the God that we don't see, if we refuse to love the brother that we do see. And we pay a price for our bitterness—not from God but from the rage that is poisoning our insides.

When I was pastor of OLSS we invited Marion Blumenthal Lazan to speak to the school about her experiences in a German Concentration Camp during World War II. She was a young child when she was in the camp. Her mother was in the same camp, but her father and brother were in another camp. She described in great detail the hardships, the starvation, the loneliness of separation from her father and brother, and the extreme cruelty of the guards. The school children and the adults present were completely silent as she went on and on about the horrors. At the end she allowed for questions, and one girl got up and asked her if she forgave the Germans for what they had done to her.

She got very agitated and wondered aloud whether the girl had listened to her story. She asked her how she would ever be able to forgive them for those terrible things. But in talking about how life had been since she got out of the camp she described nightmares, constant anger bordering on rage, stomach and intestinal problems and other ailments. She was no longer in the camp, but the camp was in her, and it was eating her up. She needed to forgive so that she could let the camp go and get on with her life.

Resentment leads to illness. It corrodes the container it comes in. WE drink the poison and hope THEY die. We walk around eaten alive by hatred and the object of our hatred is often completely unaware of us at all. We need to take the opportunity to do something about this because Jesus wants us to and also because it hurts us, and gradually turns us from people with resentments to "resentful people." We would like to keep our resentment in a little corner of our lives affecting only the person we hate but the poison spreads through our whole system and affects everything and everybody, even our relationship with God.

What can we do?

We can pray for our enemies!

We don't want to pray for them because prayer works, but unless we pray for them WE will not get better. We will remain sick, resentful people. When we hate someone the person we hate lives in our heads, he controls us. We want to be free and we cannot have that freedom as long as we hate. We need to get better, to replace resentment with acceptance, tolerance, and love, and that can only happen with prayer and through the grace of God.

No matter what we do to Jesus or to anyone else Jesus never stops loving us. Nothing we do can make him hate, or even turn away from us. He is love, and our actions will not change that. Unfortunately our actions will block His love, and in our freedom we will build a wall that not only keeps others out but keeps Him on the outside with those we hate.

Jesus is telling us that He wants us to use this time to pray for our enemies, to take down the walls that separate us from them and from Him. That is one prayer He will always answer. I hope that all of us will pray that prayer during this time of opportunity.

God bless you,

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

Jeff Conway, Pastor

JPC/smb