



Dear Friends,

Right now, most of us are frustrated with the coronavirus situation. “Wash your hands,” “wear a mask,” “keep your distance” is a chant we’re tired of hearing. Rebellious actions by the young, while foolish, are understandable. We’re all being kept from life!

As I’ve written before, Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM is my favorite spiritual writer. He’s spent literally decades studying human nature not only from a spiritual perspective but also from a theological, psychological and neuroscientific perspective. He notes,

*Brain studies have shown that we may be hardwired to focus on problems at the expense of a positive vision. The human brain wraps around fear and problems like Velcro. We dwell on bad experiences long after the fact, and spend vast amounts of energy anticipating what might go wrong in the future. Conversely, positivity and gratitude and simple happiness slide away like cheese on hot Teflon. (The Universal Christ, p.63)*

We know this. So much of the news on all media focus on the negative. News about the coronavirus is all about the numbers of the sick and dead, the debates over when and if children will be back in the classroom this fall, fear of not getting a vaccine to get rid of the disease, fear of losing jobs, etc. Granted there are positive stories, but how many, aside from those brave souls working in hospitals, can you call to mind without first having to think about it? As Rohr says, a positive outlook, being thankful and happiness “slide away like cheese on hot Teflon.”

Rohr refers to brain studies that have shown “we must consciously hold on to a positive thought or feeling for a minimum of fifteen seconds before it leaves any imprint in the neurons.” So, what’s so positive that we need to be thankful for or find happiness in?

The Catholic and Orthodox world view may be a good place to start. These branches of Christianity have held onto the view that the human race is fundamentally good. That’s based on the first chapter of Genesis where we read, “Let us make *adamah* (Hebrew for humans) in our image and likeness.” We, the human race, are made in the image and likeness of God himself. By definition all human beings are fundamentally good. Granted many have latched on to the Adam and Eve story to show how we are not good, but sinful (especially St. Augustine who coined the term “original sin”), which focuses on problems and fears at the expense of a positive vision. Perhaps “sin” is nothing more than our seemingly natural tendency to accentuate the negative. Nevertheless, the Catholic and Orthodox view of the human race has remained consistent in upholding the fundamental goodness of our race. We are flawed, but fundamentally good.

So how do we find this goodness? St. Paul tells us in I Cor. 13:13, “There are only three things that last: faith, hope and love.” The Church has labeled these “theological virtues” because they are “the very participation in the life of God.” That means these three are our spiritual DNA. They define who we are.

And we need to think of that for more than 15 seconds and strive to make those virtues the foundation of our lives.

The Third Person of the Divine Trinity, God the Spirit, has been given to us in Baptism and Confirmation which means the Spirit *lives within us*. And when we receive Communion, we physically receive the body, blood, soul and *divinity* of Christ. If God lives within us, how can we not be good?

We need to reflect on all this frequently and for more than 15 seconds if we are to find our “original goodness,” to use Rohr’s term. (Maybe that’s why we need to come to church so often.)

We all need some good news right now. The irony is we’re walking around with it, but we don’t accentuate the positive. Perhaps we don’t trust what we hear: it’s too good to be true. But that’s whole point of the “Good News”: it is true! The issue is, can we trust this “Good News”?

*Fr. Denis*