



Dear Friends,

“The times they are a changing.” Bob Dylan sang that song in 1964. The same probably can be said of today.

The 1960s ushered in a tumultuous couple of decades. Beginning with the Civil Rights Movement, the 1960 tore apart the culture of our country with wave after wave of “movements.” Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem led the Women’s Rights Movement, the Antiwar Movement deeply divided the nation, then came the Student Rebellion and the Gay Movement. All of this turmoil tore our society apart and changed American culture forever. As if this wasn’t disturbing enough, our Church went through a revolution of its own...the Second Vatican Council. Not only did the rituals change from Latin to English, but how we understood our relationship with God and with each other drastically changed as well.

What Bob Dylan sang in the '60's fits today: “the times they are a changing.” Today, large crowds of people fill our city streets with cries that echo the Civil Rights Movement; women still are not on a par with men; the country is deeply divided, we are still uncomfortable with homosexuals and citizens clash with police and differences over schools still make headlines. Add to this the large number of Church members that still cling to pre-Vatican ways. Seems nothing has changed.

But today, we struggle with another movement. While not born of a cultural revolution, it just as disruptive.... the coronavirus. This virus has become the dictator of the world, forcing people to wear masks, stay 6 feet apart and only congregate in small numbers or suffer the consequences. There is as much resistance to this as there was back in the 1960s to the various moments.

While we don’t like the dictatorship of COVID-19, it seems to me we have only two options: to simply grit our teeth and endure it or try to learn from it. The virus, like any dictator, enforces its will by fear. Around the globe people are afraid of catching this virus because it may result in painful illness or death. Dictators for centuries have relied on pain and death to impose their will. This virus is doing the same thing. And just as in any dictatorship, though we don’t like it, we have to obey or suffer the consequences.

So, what can we learn? Things have changed. That means the “new normal” will be around for a long time. My guess is even after we’ve seen the last of the coronavirus, the world will have changed and there will be no going back. I can’t believe the entire globe can suffer through a year of this pandemic and emerged unchanged. Remember COVID 19 is not the only thing changing our world. There’s the advancement of technology and the development of international economy that will add to the changes. Will there be folks who will try to live like we used to? Yes. Just like folks who fight against the changes brought on by the 1960’s, there will be those who cannot or will not move ahead. The rest of the world will evolve.

These global changes, and our resistance to them, parallels the changes in our parish. The *Renew My Church* program was brought on us because of the falling number of priests able to

pastor parishes. There are fewer and fewer priests being ordained, not enough to replace the numbers retiring. At present there are 5 parishes in the Archdiocese without a pastor. No one is there to fill those places. And the projection is that things will get much worse in the coming years. We may not like the mergers, but we have no choice.

So, we need to adjust to change. I hear our people wanting to get parish life back up. I've had requests from a Men's Group, Scouts, CWO/CCW and the Knights of Columbus to use the facilities. I'd like to say, "Sure, just tell the parish secretary the date, time and which room you'd like to use." I've had it pointed out to me that I can't do that. We have to follow the capacity regulations (how many can be in the building at any given time) and each use means things have to be disinfected and who's going to do that?

To be fair to all, we need to develop guidelines for everyone for every building. It will take some time for us to figure out the capacity and who will clean up after each meeting. I'm shooting for this to be done within two weeks. We already have several ideas on the table, but we need to find what is doable and what can be applied to every situation.

The fundamental lesson in all this may be learning that we are not in charge of life. Some believe the virus is a hoax allowing them to do what they want. Others refuse to wear a mask or keep social distance. "This is America," they say. "I can do what I want." COVID 19, which comes to us from Nature, has let us know otherwise. This is a hard lesson for anyone to learn. But if we can have the humility to *learn* from Nature, we can, perhaps, appreciate our being *part* of Nature and not its master.

How do we deal with all of this? Another song coming from those bygone days may give us a hint. The Beatles sang, "All you need is love." That's truly the answer... However not in the sense of romantic love or some emotional Hallmark-card love but in a sense of total commitment to others. That's what Jesus taught. When asked about the two greatest commandments his answer was, "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength, and ...love your neighbor as yourself." (Lk. 10:27) In other words all you need is love. Maybe we should start thinking about that. How do we love our neighbor? By wearing a mask and keeping 6 feet apart and not coming together in large numbers. All we need is love.

Fr. Denis