



Dear Friends,

Ascension & Pentecost bring the Easter season to a close. This year that season was ripped away from us. We started well with Ash Wednesday and the few Sundays of Lent we spent together. But then COVID pushed us out of our church and has not allowed us back in to this day. Lent passed and we had to view Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter itself from the comfort of our TV chair or sofa. This wasn't Lent or Easter as we knew it. We didn't get new life; we were cut off from it.

Now our doors are opening; we see people we haven't seen for weeks; some have gone back to work with a little trepidation; toilet paper has begun to reappear on supermarket shelves. The promise of new life seems to be in the air. Still the dark cloud of coronavirus looms even as hope grows stronger.

During this exile from the way we were, some question if we have learned anything, and how will things change in the future. Some announce a "new normal" will take place, while those who rush to beaches and bars cling to the "old normal." The house divided seems to still stand. Only over the course of time will the people . . . and COVID . . . tell us what, if anything, will change. COVID has been, and continues to be, fought tooth and nail and we all hope for its demise. But a dying dinosaur can be as dangerous as a live one. We need to be cautious. As our confinement comes to an end I hope we have taken this gift of time to think a bit about how we go about living.

These few weeks have shown us tremendous bravery by so many people doing what they thought were just ordinary jobs. Who would have thought that working in a grocery store or driving an ambulance could threaten your life!?!? The self-sacrifice of the medical professionals has been outstanding. "There's no greater love than to lay down one's life for a friend." And who's a "friend"? Remember the Good Samaritan story? That's what we have seen over and over in the reports about nurses and doctors during this pandemic. But it's not just them. The first responders (EMTs & police); the folks cleaning the infected floors and linens; those disposing of used protective gear all put their lives at risk. Even those driving the garbage trucks are at risk.

While we admire and respect all these people, I hope we can hear the Lord call us to go and do likewise. Can we see that such dedication to people in need . . . any kind of need . . . are the "friends" we are called to care for? Can we see these people *as* "friends" rather than "those so many people"? Can we take our cue from those who have collected and delivered food?

We all know our country is divided. Each of us has an opinion on that, I'm sure. But can we see that turning people who hold different ideas into villains, even traitors, does not build us up as a country but tears us down? We have some serious problems to solve as a nation, as a world. And no one, no nation has the corner on truth. Hospital teams, from professionals to hourly employees, had to learn to work together as one in order to solve the problems brought on by this deadly virus. Scientists around the globe are working together to find out how this disease works and how to contain it. These folks stand in stark contrast to all the haggling and jockeying for position we see from politicians of every stripe as well as well those who try to profit from this pandemic. Will we learn, or will we return to our camps, raise our flags and charge into battle with those who don't agree with us?

Scripture tells how God has used Nature and historical events to correct his people. I'm sure those events felt no different to them than this pandemic feels to us. Even when the people learned, they ultimately went back to the way they were, the old normal. We are a stubborn people, but God is equally if not more stubborn. God will never give up on us. The question is whether we will give up on ourselves.

Isaiah told us "a house divided cannot stand." Will we take that to heart before it's too late? Will we swallow our pride and learn from him who is meek and humble of heart? Or will we allow demagogues to whip up our fears and emotions so they can manipulate us to their own ends? I pray the Spirit will soften our hearts and calm us down so we can see what we're doing to ourselves and what we have the power to become. I pray we choose the better portion for our own sake and for the world.

Becoming "old" has been defined by some as the time our broad minds and narrow waists change places! Broadmindedness doesn't mean holding no opinions, but being open to hearing the truth others may have to speak, especially truth that will challenge our thinking. May the Holy Spirit guide us all.

*Fr. Denis*