



Dear Friends,

This week we, as a nation, reached a sad milestone. 500,000 of our people have died from the Coronavirus. That's about the size of the population of Atlanta, Georgia and bigger than the entire population of Miami, Florida or Omaha, Nebraska. TV personalities have noted that's more than all who died in World War I & II and Vietnam *combined!* But these are statistics, cold numbers that don't touch the heart, only the mind. We do injustice to these people if we forget they are just that...people.

One news broadcast, I think it was NBC, showed a sweeping group of headshots in columns of 15 or so deep, stretching out a long way. The camera slowly panned over this wall of remembrance. Smiling faces of men, women and children stared at the viewer. Seeing those faces of people who laughed and cried, were parents and spouses, people loved and cherished by those who remain, touched me deeply. These were folks from all walks of life who committed no crime, but only had the misfortune of contracting a virus. And so many were so young!

I thought, then, of all the families of those people who are grieving their loss. They couldn't even be by the side of their loved one as he or she crossed over. This river of tears and so much heartache throughout our nation can't be ignored.

In the face of all these destroyed human lives we may feel the urge to find someone to blame. Why didn't folks wear masks or keep distance? Why did it take so long to find a vaccine? Why didn't we do this or the government do that? We seek some way to alleviate our pain by finding someone to blame. But blame, despite the fact that it may make us feel good, does not help the living. The dead are in the hands of God. That's what we Christians believe. They are OK. But what about us? So that these 500,000 folks may not have died in vain, we, the living, owe them the respect to think about all that has happened.

So many claims have been made about Coronavirus: it's not that serious; it's a hoax; we don't need to wear masks; you can't tell me what to do, etc., etc. Sadly, in this country truth has been trashed because of these claims. Because we've lost faith in leadership both in the secular world as well as the church world, many have taken the position that "truth" is what I say it is. It can be argued that leaders both secular and sacred have brought this on. Again, the blame game helps us not at all. We, like Pontius Pilot in St. John's Gospel, have asked "Truth? What does that mean?" and have decided *I'm* the one to decide what it is.

When trust is broken, we can't believe what the other says is true. That sets us to look for people we can trust. As a consequence, people with the wildest ideas have been able to manipulate many to accept what *they* say is the truth while undermining the medical and scientific professionals, and ripping to shreds our trust in government. Without trust, there can be no truth and without trust there can be no relationship.

So, where do we go from here? We claim to be a Christian people. Perhaps we should begin by listening to the Lord.

Just before Pilot's question about truth, Jesus said this: *For this I was born, for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice* (the emphasis is mine). The obvious question is; can we trust the Lord? Will we accept what he said is true? And what was that? *Love one another as I have loved you.* (John 13:34)

If the whole point of Jesus' life was to be a testament to the truth, then he should be our source of what is true. So, what did Jesus mean by "love"? In our time that word has lots of different meanings: "*I love \_\_\_*" (fill in the blank) or sex or romantic love. But if we look at how Jesus *lived*, we find "love" for him means teaching others about God's love, dedication to alleviate the burdens of other, confront hypocrisy and power and to die for what one believes in because life is more than this world.

If that's testifying to the truth, perhaps we need to give Jesus another look during this Lent. Open your bible and read the Gospel of Mark. See what he does and what he says. Then sit and think about what you've just read. It's the least we can do to honor the 500,000 who have died and their families.

*Fr. Denis*