

Service of Remembrance: Covid-19

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When the Covid-19 pandemic became evident the Cabinet members asked me to move out of the Arrupe Jesuit Community in order to be more safe. Then the community members themselves asked me to move out in order to be safe. So, I lived for eleven months alone, five months in Bellarmine 500 after the students had left and then, when they came back, six months in a house on 13th. I received each week the frozen meals the community had had the previous week; I'd thaw them; microwave them; and eat them while watching T.V. Each day I looked to see how many people had died of COVID-19 in the State of Washington: 12, 14, 9, 21, 11. I thought about those deaths. Then I saw stories of so many elderly people dying in rest homes and poor people, and black people dying of the virus. And I thought about those deaths.

Then each Friday night Judy Woodruff would end the News Hour telling the stories and showing the families of five people who died that week. And now each week I found my eyes moist, just slightly crying. Then Los Gatos happened. Los Gatos, California, is where the Jesuits of the West have their retirement home for guys who can no longer live in other communities but need help. I desire fondly to be there myself someday worn out and used up after a long life of service as a Jesuit. What I mean by saying that Los Gatos happened is that we learned that the virus got into the community there and 15 Jesuits were positive, then 32, then 45; and 13 were in the hospital. Then the notices started coming about every third day: Bob, and Bernie, and Joe, and Silvano, and Mike, and Joseph, and Chuck, and Larry, and Jerry had died "with complications of Covid-19". Spent Jesuits—friends, classmates, teachers, companions, my Jesuit family members—died alone, on respirators, unaccompanied, without Jesuits at their bedsides saying the rosary, helping them to die.

I finally took Covid-19 fully home, home to the home of my heart, my love, my life, my faith. I found that faith does not answer or change our human realities, but faith allows them fully to come home to us. Faith—whether Jewish, or Muslim, or Christian, or Native American, or cosmic, or profoundly humanistic—brings humanity home. What a mystery life is; what a mystery love is; what a mystery death is that makes life and love more precious, more mysterious, more real, more realized. We are lucky to live in a faith community of many kinds of faith, all honored, all honorable, all treasured, all helping to bring home the mystery of life and love and death.

Throughout the millennia, plagues have been blamed on God. But if God, through evolution, makes our bodies with about three trillion cells, and each single cell more complex in content and structure than a metropolitan city, then the stuff of which we are made will go wrong. Stuff goes wrong. Viruses are stuff gone wrong. We can't blame God unless we want to be made of something other than stuff, but then we couldn't touch, or feel, or smell, or taste, or see, or hear, or make love, or thrill to beauty. Plagues cannot be blamed on God. Then over the millennia plagues were blamed on people of religions: on the Jews, on the Christians, on the Muslims—as in our day on the Chinese, the Asians. Plagues cannot be blamed on peoples of any faith or on

any peoples of the world. Plagues come about because stuff goes wrong; not because peoples go wrong.

Plagues and especially deaths from plagues—whether beloved Jesuit brothers or any beloved persons of our friends, families—bring home the mystery of the preciousness of life and love. It is from here, from this home in ourselves, that we must lament, and grieve, and feel, and feel loss, from the home in ourselves opened up by our faiths and our community of faith. Over these months so far of the pandemic we say we have been “locked down”. Yes. But in our hearts and with our faith has the loss, and the lament, and the grief at last come so home that the very place in us which has been locked down has been and now is being unlocked, opened up to feeling, and knowing, and above all serving the mystery of life, which ultimately is what we are about as a community of many faiths? If that is happening to us, that we can blame on God and that we can blame on our community of faiths.