

Good Friday: April 10, 2020

There's an old adage, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans." I've known this for a long time, but I'm still an obsessive planner. In fact, one friend and I refer to my planning as "the P-word". I've always known that many things can change before I get to put my plans into action (if I do), but that doesn't stop me planning and planning. I guess I'm the poster boy for the triumph of hope over experience!

Whether you're a dyed-in-the-wool planner like me or you're almost completely spontaneous, or somewhere in between, our current situation will probably be driving you crazy as it is me. Even for the best of us, the uncertainty with all its attendant fear and anxiety is, to say the very least, profoundly unsettling. For many of us it's not only hard to be unable to plan ahead, but it's hard even to move through the course of the day from morning to evening with any sense of security and stability about the things we normally rely on. Whether we are isolated alone, cooped up with our family, working in essential jobs like medical, first responder or grocery work, each day present new challenges to our physical, mental and spiritual sense of well-being.

Sometimes it's hard to just get through today, much less plan for tomorrow, next week or next year. We are definitely living "one day at a time" and sometimes it all we can do to go to bed at the end of the day relieved that we and those we love made it through in one piece.

Into the midst of this, the church injects the traditional liturgy of Good Friday. Here our focus is on the cross and passion of Jesus. A little later in this liturgy, you will have the chance to join me from wherever you are in veneration of the cross here in our church. But I'd like to reflect first on the gospel we just heard and how it speaks to us today.

None of the four gospel writers pulls any punches in describing the horror of Jesus' passion. There is no hiding from his suffering. The

physical suffering of scourging, crowning with thorns and being nailed to the cross. The emotional suffering of being abandoned by his disciples, of being rejected by the very people he came to save, and of being made a sacrificial lamb for those determined to hold onto political power by any means, no matter how unjust. And the spiritual suffering of feeling abandoned by God and being tempted to take the easy way out.

But there's one other thing about the passion today that I feel is very relevant to me and to all of us today. That is the sheer exhaustion that Jesus obviously experiences as he carries his cross to Calvary. He is driven down by its weight, both the physical weight and the weight of it representing his impending death. Under that weight, it must have taken every ounce of his strength—physical, emotional and spiritual—just to put one foot in front of the other.

And yet, that is what he does: Step by heavy, faltering step he moves ahead. He probably puts all of his focus and energy into the sheer act of moving forward that one next step. And, one step at a time, he journeys to Calvary. He journeys toward the moment when he can say, "It is finished". But he also journeys toward Easter Sunday and the Resurrection. He only gets there because on the way, in spite of everything that stands in his way and weighs him down, he keeps putting one foot in front of the other.

I feel that this image is especially relevant to me and all of us today. I know there have been times recently when it has taken all of my energy just to put one foot, literally or figuratively, in front of the other. But I've learned the necessity of doing exactly that right now, no matter how hard it is and no matter how much energy it takes.

Any of you who have suffered from clinical depression or anxiety know how important self-care is to being able to cope with those kinds of mental issues. You know that if we're not to end up trapped by those mental illnesses, we must keep putting one foot in front of the other.

It's not about waiting for when we feel better to do it but about doing it in order that we may feel better—more able to cope. Many of you may have no history of things like depression and anxiety, so you may be feeling them for the first time right now. If you are experiencing these for the first time because of the way our lives have changed, you can learn from those who have suffered before you.

We can all learn from Jesus on the way to Calvary.

The model of Jesus on the way to Calvary is one of focusing on the present moment and the very next moment: Putting one foot in front of the other. With all our plans thrown into disarray, Jesus teaches us by his example that we move forward not year by year, not month by month, not week by week and not even day by day. We move ahead by focusing on the present moment. By doing what is necessary to take care of ourselves and of those we love—in the present moment. By putting all of our physical, mental and spiritual energy into simply putting one foot in front of the other.

Before we go into our formal Good Friday intercessions, I invite each of you, alone or with your families, to ask Jesus our Savior, who got himself to Calvary—and from there to Easter for our sake—one painful but determined step at a time, to give each of us the grace and strength to do the same in our lives right now.