

Countering the Spiritual Darkness Brought by Coronavirus

Let me first speak plainly: I am not given to self-pity. Like all adults my age, I've experienced sadness and heartbreak – deaths, financial setbacks, disappointments – and I've wronged and hurt others, but never did I shake a fist at God, life, or fate, and ask "Why me?" Self-pity is not a part of the equation.

So please do not mistake my thoughts in this article as self-indulgent sorrow.

During the past year I have lived alone in my daughter's house in Virginia, acting as caretaker while she and her family are living in Pennsylvania. From September until March, I spent a great deal of time solitary as an anchorite, which was beneficial to my work. When I needed human company, I either telephoned friends or family, or took myself off to the library, the coffee shop, or church.

Then came the coronavirus and the quarantine. The library closed for four months, offering only curbside service for book borrowing. The coffee shop closed except for takeout. The church shut its doors for a while and even now operates at half-capacity for seating during services.

With my old life upended, I spent some of my days depressed. My spirit was beaten down by the state of my country and by quarantine restrictions, and I was angry about our governor's policies, which often appeared arbitrary and even unconstitutional.

Some normalcy has returned, though with an element of incongruity that defies comprehension. I can now enter the

library, as long as I'm wearing a mask, though patrons wear bandanas or cloth masks like mine whose effectiveness is non-existent. In the coffee shop I must wear a mask to place my order, but I can then sit in a room twelve feet from the cash register without a face covering for as long as I wish. In church we practice social distancing, but only a few parishioners wear masks.

We have followed these governmental directives to quell the spread of coronavirus, but at what cost?

What have we done to that high school senior who dreamed of playing professional football and was being wooed by colleges, but who now works out in a makeshift gym in his garage, trying to stay physically fit in case football ever returns? What damage are we doing to our kids in public and private schools, who now must endure several additional months of distance learning? What about the married couple I've heard of who are in the same nursing home, but who haven't been permitted to see each other for five months? And what of those tens of thousands of small business owners whose shops are now permanently closed and whose dreams lie shattered?

The dreams, plans, and achievements of millions are now dead in the water.

The psychological consequences of this pandemic will likely play out for years. As far back as early May, *The Washington Post* [reported](#) a staggering increase in depression among Americans, most of it linked to the virus and the lifestyle changes it caused. In July, writer Victoria Sanchez [found](#) that more than half of American adults claimed the pandemic negatively affected their mental health. Some of these symptoms will disappear when – or if – the current restrictions end, but many people may find themselves mentally afflicted by this pandemic for months, even years, into the future.

Experts also [predict](#) that COVID-19 may contribute to an increase in suicides, already the 10th-leading cause of death in the United States. Since the spring, calls to crisis help lines have skyrocketed.

Signs of this dark mood of our time are all around me. When one young woman I know speaks to me by phone, her voice is tinged with sadness. Some people have complained of an inexplicable lassitude, an inability to focus, to complete daily tasks. When I look into the eyes of the coffee shop baristas and the librarians, I detect anxiety and sorrow.

Our government tells us their restrictions will keep us alive and breathing, but what of those who are dying inside? What can we do?

We have the chance, right now, to lay plans for the future, to devise ways and means of boosting our spirits and helping family, friends, and neighbors avoid post-coronavirus depression. We can keep watch over them, let them know we are there for them if they want to talk, and most of all, show them we love them. We can try to bolster our own spirits, by force of will if necessary, by “faking it till we make it.” We can serve as examples of good cheer, however false, to those around us, particularly our children. And to those authorities who even now are speaking of a second shutdown, we must say “NO” in whatever way we can.

The core of the American Dream is individual liberty, and with that liberty comes individual responsibility. The government should allow us more opportunities to make our own decisions, and we must strive to help those around us who are suffering from the psychological battering inflicted by this pandemic.

Someday we may remove our masks, but the shadows of COVID-19 will linger. It's up to us to bring light into that darkness.

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