

St. Ambrose Parish

APRIL 18, 2021
BEEHIVE

Amoris Laetitia *The Joy of Love: On Love in the Family*

Five years ago in April 2016, Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation "*Amoris Laetitia*" was released. The document marked a shift away from an exclusive emphasis on the church's idealistic image of family life, one that had often felt out of reach for ordinary Catholics. "At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families," Pope Francis wrote. "This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God's grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite."

While still encouraging Catholics to live up to the church's ideal for marriage, Pope Francis said, pastors must find ways to welcome the many Catholics living in relationships deemed "irregular" in church teaching: Catholics who had been divorced and civilly remarried without having their first marriage annulled, gay and lesbian couples and unmarried cohabitating couples. Many Catholics in these situations had expressed that they felt ostracized by the church, being told they were "living in sin."

In light of the church's "solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations," the pope wrote, "it can no longer simply be said that all those in any 'irregular' situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace." Instead, the document instructs pastors to work with such couples to examine their consciences for what God is calling them to do and to discern "with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response that can be given to God," keeping in mind that the answer may not be the same for everyone.

Using insights from the Synod of Bishops on the Family and from bishops' conferences from around the world, Pope Francis affirms church teaching on family life and marriage,

but strongly emphasizes the role of personal conscience and pastoral discernment. He urges the church to appreciate the context of people's lives when helping them make good decisions. The goal is to help families—in fact, everyone—experience God's love and know that they are welcome members of the church. All this may require what the pope calls "new pastoral methods".

Here are ten things to know about the pope's groundbreaking new document.

1. The church needs to understand families and individuals in all their complexity. The church needs to meet people where they are. So pastors are to "avoid judgments which do not take into account the complexity of various situations" (296). People should not be "pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for personal and pastoral discernment" (298). In other words, one size does not fit all. People are encouraged to live by the Gospel, but should also be welcomed into a church that appreciates their particular struggles and treats them with mercy. "Thinking that everything is black and white" is to be avoided. And the church cannot apply moral laws as if they were "stones to throw at people's lives". Overall, he calls for an approach of understanding, compassion and accompaniment.

2. The role of conscience is paramount in moral decision making. "Individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the church's practice in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage". That is, the traditional belief that individual conscience is the final arbiter of the moral life has been forgotten here. The church has been "called to form consciences, not to replace them". Yes, it is true, the Pope says, that a conscience needs to be formed

Continued on page 2

“Amoris Laetitia” – Five Years Later

Continued from page 1

by church teaching. But conscience does more than to judge what does or does not agree with church teaching. Conscience can also recognize with “a certain moral security” what God is asking (303). Pastors, therefore, need to help people not simply follow rules, but to practice “discernment,” a word that implies prayerful decision making.

3. Divorced and remarried Catholics need to be more fully integrated into the church. How? By looking at the specifics of their situation, by remembering “mitigating factors,” by counseling them in the “internal forum,” (that is, in private conversations between the priest and person or couple), and by respecting that the final decision about the degree of participation in the church is left to a person’s conscience. (The reception of Communion is not spelled out here, but that is a traditional aspect of “participation” in church life.) Divorced and remarried couples should be made to feel part of the church. “They are not excommunicated and should not be treated as such, since they remain part” of the church.

4. All members of the family need to be encouraged to live good Christian lives. Much of “Amoris Laetitia” consists of reflections on the Gospels and church teaching on love, the family and children. But it also includes a great deal of practical advice from the pope, sometimes gleaned from exhortations and homilies regarding the family. Pope Francis reminds married couples that a good marriage is a “dynamic process” and that each side has to put up with imperfections. “Love does not have to be perfect for us to value it”. The pope, speaking as a pastor, encourages not only married couples, but also engaged couples, expectant mothers, adoptive parents, widows, as well as aunts, uncles and grandparents. He is especially attentive that no one feels unimportant or excluded from God’s love.

5. We should no longer talk about people “living in sin.” In a sentence that reflects a new approach, the pope says clearly, “It can no longer simply be said that all those living in any ‘irregular situation’ are living in a state of mortal sin”. Other people in “irregular situations,” or non-traditional families, like single mothers, need to be offered “understanding, comfort and acceptance”. When it comes to these people, indeed everyone, the church needs to stop applying moral laws, as if they were, in the pope’s vivid phrase, “stones to throw at a person’s life”.

6. What might work in one place may not work in another. The pope is not only speaking in terms of individuals,

but geographically as well. “Each country or region ... can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs”. What makes sense pastorally in one country may even seem out of place in another. For this reason and others, as the pope says at the beginning of the document that for this reason, not every question can be settled by the magisterium, that is, the church’s teaching office.



7. Traditional teachings on marriage are affirmed, but the church should not burden people with unrealistic expectations. Marriage is between one man and one woman and is indissoluble; and same-sex marriage is not considered marriage. The church continues to hold out an invitation to healthy marriages. At the same time, the church has often foisted upon people an “artificial theological ideal of marriage” removed from

people’s everyday lives. At times these ideals have been a “tremendous burden”. To that end, seminarians and priests need to be better trained to understand the complexities of people’s married lives. “Ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families”.

8. Children must be educated in sex and sexuality. In a culture that often commodifies and cheapens sexual expression, children need to understand sex within the “broader framework of an education for love and mutual self-giving”. Sadly, the body is often seen as simply “an object to be used”. Sex always has to be understood as being open to the gift of new life.

9. Gay men and women should be respected. While same-sex marriage is not permitted, the pope says that he wants to reaffirm “before all else” that the homosexual person needs to be “respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, and ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression or violence.” Families with LGBT members need “respectful pastoral guidance” from the church and its pastors so that gays and lesbians can fully carry out God’s will in their lives.

10. All are welcome. The church must help families of every sort, and people in every state of life, know that, even in their imperfections, they are loved by God and can help others experience that love. Likewise, pastors must work to make people feel welcome in the church. “Amoris Laetitia” offers the vision of a pastoral and merciful church that encourages people to experience the “joy of love.” The family is an absolutely essential part of the church, because after all, the church is a “family of families”.

All Things Considered

I don't recall ever getting an explanation as to why the Catholic Services Appeal centralized their approach. It happened last spring just as the Covid pandemic was closing us down. Prior to that, we had already received the printed materials for the campaign. I had already prepared my initial request letter to our parishioners.

At some point last Spring, we were told to discard the campaign materials and that the CSA would be run by a professional fund-raising company called Cathedral Corporation out of Rome, New York. Nothing wrong in getting some new ideas and approaches, and CC was equipped with a fresh electronic/interactive way of doing things.

But, as they say, the devil is in the details. There were mis-mailings, and accounting snafus. For some reason, the reporting services of CC go to Albert Lea, Minnesota. Their help line directed callers to a Mercedes Dealership in Los Angeles. In all this, we lost people at the Archdiocesan level who could give answers. When it looked like the 2020 CSA campaign was going to be another victim of the pandemic, I stepped in and approached our parishioners directly, because as you know, if we do not make the target, it becomes a debt to the parish.

During my pastorate, we have only failed to make the CSA target once, and that was in 2011 when the Changing Lives Together program was run simultaneously with the CSA. As it happened, St. Ambrose performed in the top 10% of all the parishes in that effort – coming up with pledges and donations in excess of one million dollars. So it's understandable that the CSA had a shortfall that year. That \$20,000 shortage is still carried on our books as a "payable" to the AoD.

Now, I would be crazy to suggest that running a major fund raiser every Spring is a job that I want to hold onto. But the fact of the matter is that you and I have figured out a way of helping not only our larger Church, but also the parish. Our surplus, being free from the usual 7% assessment, was a way of putting additional revenues into our operations – those funds were always applied to our property and liability insurance premiums which run about \$1,000 a week. Last year we took a hit when it came to a surplus.

A botched CSA hurts everybody. Which is why we're trying to get ahead of the campaign this time around. In the past couple of days you received a letter from Archbishop Vigneron asking for your help in the 2021 CSA campaign. Please consider his appeal with the same graciousness as you would mine. Follow the mailing or on-line instructions as laid out by the Cathedral Corporation personnel.

When I arrived here there was a sign on our office bulletin board which said: "Raising funds. It's a nasty job but somebody's got to do it." That turned out to be the leitmotif of my pastorate. We've accomplished much with your generosity over these three decades. I have every reason to expect that will continue as we look toward re-imagining parish life post Covid.



While our 2021 Lenten Dinners weren't quite what they have been in previous years – events for community and collegiality and an all-you-can-eat fish dinner in an attractive, sit-down setting – they did provide seven weeks of delicious carry-out dinners for around 175 diners per week. In large measure due to the work of our office manager, Peggy O'Connor, the online ordering system, carry-out fulfillment and curbside pickup worked like a charm.

But as so often happens with our Fish Dinners, we didn't make any

money offering delicious-yet-medium-priced dinners to our parishioners, neighbors and others. In fact, we lost \$2,800. Not our worst loss by far!

The deficit is attributable to multiple causes. This would include an increased price of fish; the astronomical cost of purchasing carry-out packaging – an expense we didn't have in non-Covid years; the loss of liquor sales and a couple weeks of mediocre attendance.

The wild card was the cost of packaging – no surprise given the increased demand for such goods by restaurants trying to exist solely on carry-outs and curbside pickups.

We learned years ago that the profits of the St. Ambrose Lenten Dinners are not counted in cash. They have been about community – sharing food with family and friends – enriching our bonds in faith – making all feel welcome here. This happened even if we only waved at one another in the parking lot while picking up dinner to go.

We don't design events to lose money, but even though we lost some and couldn't experience the enjoyment of weekly dinner with a couple hundred friends, we did manage to keep some of the best parts of Lenten Dinners: community, service, sharing and ... tater tots.

Thanks to our many volunteers: Janet Andring and Family; Mike Andrzejczyk; Lina Baer; Beverly, Katie and Nick Bennert; the Bernas Family: Ron, Kate, Patrick and Eleanor; Anne Billiu; Jim and Pat Davis; Ella Hugh, the Johnson Family: Leonard, Melony, Anna, Ella and Sara; The Paul and Blanchy Kaminsky Family; Lindsey Kodanko; Theresa Lopiccolo, Betty McGee; Siobahn McGlone, Chris Miller, Becca Moin, Edie O'Byrne; Katherine Paquette and friends; Margie and Stan Prokop; Graham Rebain; Matthew Robert; Julie Roeder; Joyce Rondini, Sandy Stenger, the Strong Family; Jackie Whaley, Yolanda Whaley, Cassidy and Kelly Woolums; Raphael Zammit and Celeste Zogas.

Dispensation Expired

While the general dispensation that relieved all Catholics in the Archdiocese from their moral obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days has expired, our Archbishop Vigneron said he will continue to grant “particular dispensations” to those in need, including those who are at high risk of Covid-19.

Others who may continue to be excused from their Sunday obligation include:

- Those who are ill or whose health would be significantly compromised were they to contract a communicable illness;
- Those who care for the sick, homebound or infirmed or someone in a high-risk category;
- Pregnant women;
- Those age 65 or older;
- Those who cannot attend Mass for other reasons (such as a lack of transportation or being turned away because of capacity limits); and
- Those who have “significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass.”

Anyone who exhibits flu-like symptoms or believes they might be asymptotically carrying COVID-19 or another communicable illness also are asked not to attend Mass “as an act of justice and charity” toward others, Archbishop Vigneron states.

“In allowing the general dispensation to expire, we welcome back to Mass all Catholics who have already been engaged in other activities that would present a similar or greater risk of exposure, such as eating out at restaurants, traveling, partaking in non-essential shopping, and widening one’s circle of contacts,” the Archbishop wrote. “These individuals should also prepare to return to Mass in recognition of its preeminence in our lives as Catholics.”

Masses will still be offered online and serve as “a means to help Catholics nourish their souls” when they could not be present for Mass.



The Buzz

A number of years ago, an older woman of the parish (who has since gone home to live with the risen Lord) told me she was asked “What does Chuck do at St. Ambrose?” She said she told the person, “He’s like an old altar boy who carries the cross in church.”

The above picture gives some proof of my credentials for that role from 60+ years ago. I was in the third grade at Mt. Carmel Parish in Wyandotte when I started to serve and this group shot was taken. I am the front row, the seventh person from the left - the second from the center break.

These were pre-Vatican II days (probably the same school year that Pope John XXIII called – in January of 1959 – for the Council which would not begin until later in 1962). So of course, everything was in Latin back then. One of the strict nuns from our parish high school was in charge. I still remember sitting in a high school classroom with all the other boys who wanted to become servers. Sister gave us an on-the-spot language memorization test. Who could quickly learn the response to the priest’s opening line at the foot of the altar: “*Introibo ad altare Dei*”? (I bet a number of you could even recite it today! I’d be most impressed if any woman from that era could do the same.) Those who could memorize the response before the end of the meeting were placed in a fast-track training group. The rest could try again later. My fearful, traumatized attempt must have sounded more like glossolalia than Latin. I had to come back another time or two. But I did, and the rest as they say is history.

We were Knights of the Altar! We had ranks, up which a server progressed over time and performance evaluations. There were corresponding pins like on a military uniform that could be attached to your cassock to indicate your achievement. I remember words like apprentice, page, knight, grand knight . . . (Do any of you remember more details about such altar boy things?)

Anyway, this photo was found with some other family memorabilia brought over from my parents’ house more than a decade ago. My wife conspired with some very nice people to have it professionally restored and given to me as an Easter gift. During this liturgical season when the Liturgy focuses a lot on ministry and how the early Church acted in response to the Resurrection and to Pentecost, this picture gave me pause to remember my own roots and history in ministry. I encourage you to take a prayerfully reflective moment sometime during this Eastertime and look back at your own path of discipleship.

Give thanks to God for where you’ve been; and pray for the Spirit’s powerful presence to be with you on the road ahead. For me, although I don’t think she meant it as a compliment, “an old altar boy carrying the cross” might be a description – at a whole lot more profound level – that I would hope to deeply and dearly embrace even today.

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The Buzz... Continued

One of the many things I thank God for over the past 60 years is indeed the progressive and liberating development of the Church. I know there are some, even in high ranking church circles, who disagree. Wouldn't Catholics be better off if we could go back to the 50s . . . 19, 18, or even 1750s? How silly; life doesn't work that way; it would be contrary to nature itself.

Give thanks for the beautiful grandeur of the classical music settings of the mass from the past, but also for relevant and pronounceable vernacular translations of the prayers which we have found out belong to all of us to pray and not just for the priest. Give thanks for the inclusive and expanding roles for women in the Church today . . . may they continue to grow in ever new and expansive ways. A picture of a server group in most parishes today would look a lot different from the one above . . . thank God. And what about Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion?! Thank God. And the Permanent Diaconate which often allowed the Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders to come together in the same individual? . . . thank God. And so much more!

"You are witnesses of these things." These are the closing words of today's Gospel passage. What have you witnessed? Prayerfully reflect and join with those original disciples in naming how you have seen the Lord with us in the past. But don't stop there. Realize that the same Lord who has been with us, is always rising to be with us in unexpectedly new ways both now and in the future. Christ is real; the same; yet always new . . . thank God.



Finally, I want to start asking early for anyone willing to help in just over a month at one or more of our Pentecost masses (May 22 & 23) by reading a few lines of the first reading in another language. We did this for a number of years, and it became a well-received mode of proclaiming the Word on that very special Solemnity. See me in church or give me a call at 313-332-5631 anytime.

Chuck Dropiewski

Grosse Pointe Points

The Grosse Pointe Historical Society's spring Bicknell Lecture Series continues at 7:30 p.m. this Wednesday, April 21st and revolves around Grosse Pointe's real estate point system and ethnic diversity in the 1960s.

Co-sponsored by the Grosse Pointes & Harper Woods branch of the NAACP, the lecture is presented by Kathy El-Messidi, author of the 1972 book "Grosse Pointe, Michigan: Race Against Race," and Douglas Vrieland, author of "The Fort: Growing Up in Grosse Pointe during the Civil Rights Movement."

In 1966, when the first African American family purchased a home in the Grosse Pointes, a "straw buyer" was required and in April 1969, Grosse Pointe Farms defeated an open housing ordinance. Thus, despite the adoption of the U.S. Fair Housing Act in 1968, ethnic diversity came slowly to the community.

Until about a half century ago, a point system — which included a discriminatory questionnaire — existed in the community. Additionally, what the system did not put into print was that individuals of Polish, Greek, Italian and/or Jewish descent had to have progressively higher scores to be considered for residency. There were no ratings that would permit those of Asian or African descent to move into the community. "When it comes to the real estate point system, those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it," said Mike Skinner, a trustee with the historical society and chairman of the Bicknell series. "It's important that people remember the past, even if it's not positive."

Attendance at lectures is free and open to the public. "You never have to be a member to attend," Skinner said. Connecting to the lectures is easy, he added, but advanced registration is required so instructions for remote access may be emailed to participants. Registration may be accessed online at bit.ly/Bicknell04-21.

Marcellina's Book Club

Learning
to Pray

A Guide for Everyone
JAMES
MARTIN, SJ

In *Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone*, Jesuit James Martin, one of America's most beloved spiritual leaders and the New York Times bestselling author of *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* and *Jesus: A Pil-*

grimage teaches anyone to converse with God in this comprehensive guide to prayer

Martin lays out the different styles and traditions of prayer throughout Christian history and invites us to experiment and discover which works best to feed our soul and build intimacy with our Creator. Father Martin makes clear there is not one secret formula for praying. But like any relationship, each person can discover the best style for building an intimate relationship with God, regardless of religion or denomination. Prayer, he teaches us, is open and accessible to anyone willing to open their heart.

The Beehive

is the parish weekly bulletin of the
St. Ambrose Catholic Community
Detroit/Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan

Pastor: Rev. Timothy R. Pelc

Pastoral Minister: Charles Dropiewski

Religious Education: Kelly Anne Woolums

Minister of Music: Dr. Norah Duncan IV

Office Manager: Peggy O'Connor

Secretary: Mary Urbanski

Sacramental Celebrations

Masses: On the Lord's Day –

Saturday Vigil - 4:00 p.m.

Sunday - 8:30 & 11:15 a.m.

Baptism: Arrangements for both adults and infants to be made by contacting the rectory.

Penance: As announced and by appointment.

Marriage: Couples should contact the rectory office a minimum of six months in advance of the proposed date to make arrangements.

Funeral: Normally celebrated within one week after the deceased's passing.

Directory

Parish Office: 15020 Hampton

Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan 48230

Tel: (313) 822-2814 **Fax:** (313) 822-9838

Email address: stambrose@comcast.net

Religious Education: (313) 332-5633

Pastoral Ministry: (313) 332-5631

Ark Scheduling: (313) 822-2814

Parish Website: stambrosechurch.net

Liturgy Schedule

April 19

Easter Weekday

April 20

Easter Weekday

8:30 a.m. – Mary Bissa; Ann Sullivan Kay

April 21

St. Anselm, bishop & doctor

April 22

Easter Weekday

7:00 p.m. – Mass – Rev. Ron Cyprys

April 23

St. George, martyr

St. Adalbert, bishop & martyr

12:00 – p.m. – Thomas & Julia Kotula;

Don Sellke; Neal and Phyllis Shine

April 24

Fourth Sunday of Easter

4:00 p.m. – Mass – For All People

April 25

Fourth Sunday of Easter

8:30 – Mass – For All People

11:15 – Mass – For All People

Spending Spotlight

The ARK has a regular annual inspection of the fire suppression system. This year, the inspection found a couple of “minor” fixes that needed to be made in order for the ARK to pass. The cost was a not-so-minor \$1,261.

Scriptures for the 3rd Week of Easter

April 19

Acts 6: 8-15

Ps 119: 23-24, 26-27, 29-30

Jn 6: 22-29

April 20

Acts 7: 51-8: 1a

Ps 31: 3cd-4, 6, 7b, 8a, 17, 21ab

Jn 6: 30-35

April 21

Acts 8: 1b-8

Ps 66: 1-3a, 4-7a

Jn 6: 35-40

April 22

Acts 8: 26-40

Ps 66: 8-9, 16-17, 20

Jn 6: 44-51

April 23

Acts 9: 1-20

Ps 117; 1bc, 2

Jn 6: 52-59

April 24

Acts 9: 31-42

Ps 116: 12-17

Jn 6: 60-69

April 25

Acts 4: 8-12

Ps 118: 1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29

1 Jn 3: 1-2

Jn 10: 11-18

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 24th-25th

Saturday at 4:00 p.m. (broadcast online on Sunday starting at 8:00 a.m.)

Sunday at 8:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m.

Seating at mass is now up to 50% of the building's capacity
– roughly 300 persons.

To participate electronically, go to: facebook.com/stambroseparish where the Saturday liturgy will be available for viewing starting at 8 a.m. on Sunday.

The general dispensation from the Sunday obligation has ended – with particular dispensations granted. For specifics visit aod.org/comehometohope-dispensation

Your Envelope Speaks ... the Inside Story

To operate, each week our parish requires a *minimum* of..... \$10,100.00

On Sunday, April 11, 2021

in envelopes we received \$4,451.00

in the loose collection \$2,363.00

in electronic donations \$4,332.00

for a total of \$11,146.00

Over budget for the week.....\$1,046.00

Number of envelopes mailed 709

Number of envelopes used55



Our Sick

Please pray for those who are seriously ill or who are hospitalized: Bp. Thomas Gumbleton, Mae Christine Busque, Pat Blake, Karen Culver, Donald Miriani, Bonnie McKenna, Jeanne Noto, David Schumacker, Matthew Elias, George Buccer, Emilie Kasper, Darby O’Toole, Anna Noto Billings, Eileen O’Brien, Liz Linne, Donna Barnes, Alexandra Cullen, Charmaine Kaptur, Frank Gregory, Alex Billiu, Jerry Hansen, Jackie Walkowski, Kristen Kingzett, Maria Simcina, Brian Tague, Sharif Hannan, Shirley Whelan, Anne Purvis, Chris Walsh, Jerry Gutowski, Kevin O’Connor, Mike Lesnau, Giovanni Morreale, Albina Checki, Steve Daudlin and those suffering and hospitalized worldwide with COVID-19.

2	0	CSA
2	1	Box Scores

Number of Families 800

Returns to date 1

Average Gift in '20\$596.00

AoD Quota in '21\$93,007

Property/Liability Insurance ... \$52,000

Adjusted parish target \$145.007

Received as of 4/13/2021..... \$ 3,900

- The CSA target number assigned by the Archdiocese is based on a complex formula which is based in measure on a three year average of the offertory and Christmas collections. Since CSA is exempt from the 7% diocesan tax, we try to 'piggy-back' our insurance premiums to this campaign. That happens only after the \$93,007 target is reached.

Prayer - Study Community - Service

Aquinas College in Grand Rapids welcomes high school students to our campus for our upcoming AQ-Day on Friday, May 7th. Experience firsthand what it means to be a Saint!

Events include an overview of the college and a campus tour. This event will allow high schoolers to explore AQ’s academics, athletics and scholarships, as well as our Dominican pillars of prayer, study, community and service.

See their mission in action and how small is indeed mighty! Details and registration can be found at aquinas.edu/visit.



What we've been missing

A new mood pervades every socially distanced conversation now that America's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is underway. And, I should add, the delays in distribution have done nothing to dampen this mood. For whatever the logistical and moral failures of our country's sundry vaccination programs, it is undeniable that hope has entered the scene in a new and palpable way. There is an end in sight to this nightmare; that is reason enough for joy. It is a joy of resurrection, of new life in the flesh.

We anticipate a return to life as we knew it, to communion with one another in all its varied forms. We eagerly await the return of the old, happy bustle, restaurants and bars and coffee houses full and humming with chatter and clatter. We also look forward to what we cannot expect: those chance meetings that constitute the thrill of the everyday. The totality of human community—which must include those nameless faces, those passing mysteries who exist in the background of our quotidian routines—is just months, not years, away. Soon, I will be able to smile at a stranger with more than just my eyes.

“Peace be with you,” the resurrected Christ said to his disciples when he appeared in their midst, behind doors they had shut in fright. To say the same words to one another, on an ordinary Sunday, would mean resurrection; to sing with one another even more so. A few Sundays ago, the celebrant at Mass announced that the strictures on public singing had been relaxed and people should once again join in the singing of the major Mass parts. Barely anyone did. Fear has too much choked the sanctuary, and we long to hear the words, “Fear not,” so that we may clothe Christ's sacramental flesh, exposed and present among us, with a fitting raiment of praise.

The coronavirus has shattered the rhythm of our social clocks, halting that most human of activities: marking time with ritual and celebration. Some of the mystics among us report that they have been living in an “eternal now” since the pandemic began. But for those of us who have yet to attain these spiritual heights, the recurrence of the same, again

and again, has made of each day an inescapable limbo. Both our secular and religious calendars remind us that time is not meant to be empty and directionless, that instead it should pulse with a melody spiraling toward the future. The pandemic muffled that music. Soon we will be able to hear it again.

Many of us spent Thanksgiving and Christmas alone, engaging friends and family only through a screen. And we were the fortunate ones: hundreds of thousands of Americans had died by the time the holidays arrived. Because of the virus's high transmissibility, their loved ones were barred from their right to mourn in bodily proximity to the departed. Yet we hope that, after just a few more months, our pent-up tears can flow again as family members safely meet to embrace one another and honor their beloved dead.

This year has taught us in an unprecedented way what it means to look for the resurrection of the flesh. “In my flesh I shall see God,” Job proclaimed from his own isolation and pain; and so it was that in human flesh God was seen, appearing again in the body after the horror of crucifixion and absence. The Christian doctrine of the Resurrection—so repugnant to Greek sensibilities when St. Paul first preached it at the Areopagus—has become all too comprehensible after the collective trauma we have suffered: of course Christ returned to his friends and his mother in his flesh, however transfigured; of course doubting Thomas wanted to feel his way into the Resurrection. “I touch, therefore I am” will be our new refrain when we are at last raised up from the pit.

I suspect that even after COVID-19 recedes into memory—God hasten the day—we will not soon forget the joy of resurrection. Perhaps the recollection of it will make us more patient with the flesh of others. Perhaps it will grant us more compassion for our own flesh too. And perhaps we will comprehend more intimately why the flesh is our eternal destiny, and why God has forever made it his own.

By Roberto J. De La Noval, for the April 3, 2021 issue of Commonweal Magazine.

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