

Companions on the Journey

June 7, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ

As I write this column it is Tuesday and there have been several days of rioting and racial unrest because a man was murdered by a police officer kneeling on his neck. All this while the man on the ground pleaded that he could not breathe. Who would do such a thing? I do not know. But because the man on the ground was a black man and the policeman kneeling on him was a white man so much more has been aroused. Certain primordial emotions have been touched and reawakened.

Sometimes during this pandemic I sensed an almost eerie quiet. I didn't know what was going on but things were too quiet. Everybody in their homes. The roads empty. We are a noisy people. My antennae were up. It was like my mother yelling upstairs after us boys when things got too quiet. Something was up. She didn't know what but something. I didn't know what but something. I had no idea that it would be this unleashing of deep and searing anger.

Haven't you sensed that our very country has been building to something these past fifteen or twenty years? From the Y2K new millennium and the disputed presidential victory of President Bush through the years of 9/11 and on into the Great Recession through the era of President Obama with some successes but also with a further estrangement in our world. And now under President Trump there was some progress and yet some very callous backsliding until the coronavirus struck and the decision was made to stop working and isolate in our homes. It all seemed to make sense at the time but then we know things now we did not know then. We are not meant to isolate like that. Not for long periods of time. It does something to us. There is a tentativeness that enters in and also a desire to burst out of the quarantine as if making a proclamation to the inanimate virus: "You can't imprison me!" "You can't dictate how I am going to live."

It is almost as if when Mr. George Floyd was killed it lit a match in our country at a time when we were all dry tinder. Now there is the possibility of a real conflagration. Many others had been killed already but this one, this one touched a chord. And then there was no holding back. Out it all came. And while some was respectful and peaceful and striving for unity, many others had just had it up to here and they were mad and were not going to take it anymore. And still others see this as an opportunity to be lawless and to "take" what is not theirs but to do so without repercussion. Nothing good.

I remember thinking many years ago when I was studying American history, how could they have let things get to such a place that the country actually broke out into a devastating civil war with immense casualties on both sides but living right now I understand. We could be on the verge of a new kind of civil war ourselves. This is a very dangerous time in our country's history. We who believe in Christ and the power of his Spirit, and who are resolved to pray every day, it is up to us to pray with greater fervor and attention to the various ethnicities who are aggrieved and unjustly treated.

It is up to us to stand for the truth of the way of Jesus in a world that dismisses him as quaint and old fashioned. He is anything but. There is great need for the adults in the world to stand up and to take the lead in reconciling disputes, giving good example, teaching our children, forsaking any and all prejudices, and finding the grace we need to reach out a hand of forgiveness and a hand of mercy. If not, then Our Lord's protective shield will dissipate and we will be at ever greater risk. This is a truly seminal time in the history of our country. The goal is not to win or have our own viewpoint vindicated. The goal is to connect, stay connected, listen to others and forge an atmosphere of harmony and to live in that Truth that is Jesus Christ, him crucified and risen. My friends, this is an important time for us as Catholics to step forward in our faith and seek to be the bridge builders to peace that Our Lord so desires us to be. Perhaps that is the inner lining of this pandemic—our increased time for prayer. Our country needs us, needs us as our best selves, right now.

Peace, Msgr. McHenry