

**Companions on the Journey**

June 14, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ

As I write this column it is Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of June. We have begun the process of reentry to full parish life. We are making progress but we are going to take our time and return in phases. You are not ready for full parish life and we are not either. I continue to believe that this three month experience of the corona virus, the confinement at home, the interruption in almost all of our usual routines, the discontinuity of our recreation and entertainment involvements, the loss of revenue and sometimes jobs and now with the terrible murder of a black man by an indifferent police officer has just unleashed all sorts of pent up emotions seeking outlet. There are changes that will be made.

I am a man of hope. That hope is born of my being loved by Jesus Christ and receiving the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. Hope is a theological virtue. You will remember that Saint Paul, in his great hymn of praise to love concludes by saying that in the end there are only three things that last—faith, hope and love—and the greatest of these is love. True enough. But those three realities are called the theological virtues. Theo-logical. From the understanding of God. Faith (trust) and Hope and Love are essential to the God in whom we believe. That is why they last. They come from God and they are of God and will always be.

The changes that we must make in our lives, in our society, in our way of interacting with each other as human beings can only work if they are in harmony with God's vision for this world. Just pause for a moment and ponder that. We can make all sorts of changes in the way things work. But if what we change to is not part of God's new creation it will not work and it will not last, no matter how much conviction on our part lies behind the change.

That is what Jesus meant when he used the image of the vine and the branches. If we are not grafted onto the vine, then we may look like we are full of life but we will not be. We will be dying—slowly—but dying, nonetheless. There is only one way that works in this world. It is what has been revealed by Jesus Christ. We are to love God first of all, and with everything we have and everything we are. Then, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to love our neighbor as Jesus loved us. That is it. If we do not live that way, we may thrive for a time, but we will wilt. If we do not live in harmony with the gospel message of Jesus where everyone counts and not just some, not just the chosen ones or the easily recognized ones or the well-known ones. But everybody, especially the poor, then, we will fail.

These past three months have been given to us to pray and to ponder as well. There are things that need to be changed. There are bad ways of thinking and some bad ways of acting that must stop. Each person has to choose. We are not to allow ourselves to be swept up in the popular uprisings. Each of us will stand before our crucified and risen Lord one day and there will be no surging crowds of which we are part. There will only be I, myself, before the Christ who was incarnate and lived our life to the full. There will be no pretending, no finessing, no deception. He is the living God who can neither deceive nor be deceived. He is the vine. We are either connected to his life—or we are dead, forever. Pretty stark. But very real. Time to think. Time to make some choices. Time to do only the right thing.

Peace, Msgr. McHenry