

Companions on the Journey

July 19, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ

When I was a lad and attending grade school at Saint John of the cross in Roslyn, the report cards were a light yellow beige color with black print, 8 1/2 by 11 folded in landscape fashion with a crease in the middle. Inside on the right side were listed the subjects and next to the subject were spaces to enter a numerical grade for each quarter and then a final grade for the year. On the left side were listed a series of virtues—Obedience, Self-Control, Cooperation, Perseverance, etc. There was similarly a space for a grade each quarter and for the year. These were not numbers though. These were letters. A, outstanding. B, satisfactory but needing improvement. C, unsatisfactory. The C, when given, was often written in red ink. Just to make sure it was noticed. To get first honors you had to have all 90's in your subjects and all A's in your virtues. I didn't get too many first honor certificates. The subject grades would qualify but the virtues were somewhat lacking.

Self-Control was my nemesis. Next to that virtue, in parenthesis, was this sentence: Restrains hasty impulses. As a general rule I did not restrain hasty impulses. Actually, I tended to embrace hasty impulses, cultivate hasty impulses, and even collect hasty impulses. There were times when I thought my task was actually to perfect hasty impulses. I sure was good in the arena of hasty impulses—much to the chagrin of my Sisters and Teachers. Learning self-control has been a lifelong task for me. I am much better than I was but the Lord is definitely not finished with me yet.

I go into this because of all that has been transpiring in our country and world because of the coronavirus. Trying to get my impulse control in the right spot has been a challenge to say the least. I have had two fourteen-day periods of quarantine so far. One after we returned from the Holy Land and was quarantined until the end of March and then again after I was called to anoint a dozen different people in four different Nursing Homes over a week's time. Quarantine does not lend itself easily to hasty impulse control. It has been four months now. Some have begun to venture out again, to the store, to Church, to the Beauty Parlor or Barber Shop. Some have ventured down the shore or up to the mountains. Some have begun to have little family gatherings, often with the social distance protocols in place.

But there is something I sense happening inside me and others. There is this reticence to go out. This wanting to stay safe. This not wanting to "put my own health or the health of another" at risk. I want to restrain that hasty impulse. But some fear has begun to seep into my soul. That is something we must look at with both eyes wide open. As a general principle, decisions we humans make out of fear turn out to be bad decisions. Decisions we make based on what is the right thing, the moral thing, the compassionate thing, the selfless thing—these decisions tend to be the right decisions. Fears or concerns that center on our health must be taken seriously. At the same time, we cannot allow ourselves to begin to think that we must find a way to avoid every risk, including risks to our health, before we venture out or before we interact with others again. That is not life. And it certainly is not life with faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

It is a balancing act but a balancing act that we must embrace. Not every husband and wife will agree on the best course of action all the time. Not every parent and child will agree. Let there be discussion and debate but let there also be patience and the absence of finger-pointing or accusation. This actually is a time to give some free rein to the hasty impulses of life and a time to really avoid giving in to the more fearful or nasty impulses that sometimes arise out of our fears. All of this points to our greater need for prayer. So, let us embrace our need for prayer and ask the Lord to help us with our proper impulse control.

Peace,

Monsignor McHenry