

Companions on the Journey

January 10, 2021

Dear Friends,

Last Sunday night after the Spanish language Mass, I was called to Artman Home to anoint a resident who had come down with the corona-virus. She was the sixteenth person I have anointed with covid19 (in various hospitals or nursing facilities) since this pandemic began. I have been very blessed to be able to bring the consolation of the sacrament of healing to people at the end of their life here on earth. It is painful in many ways. Not just because the particular person is dying but almost always the family is not able to be present with them. In this particular instance I spoke with the woman's daughter on the Head Nurses' phone. The daughter had been close by, in the building trying to use the phone to console her mother, but not able to visit her own mother who was afflicted with dementia. She spoke to me about herself and her sister and how their mom had been such a good and loving mom. They had already lost her to dementia the first time. Now here they were about to lose her for the final time and just were not able to be present to comfort, support and simply be present like Mary was at Calvary.

In this case I am a substitute for them and the Nurses' Aides are as well. But you know that it just isn't the same. This corona virus is a cruel disease and so are some of the restrictions which have been imposed in an effort to thwart this disease. I was in the Nurses Office for about twenty minutes while they scouted up a head covering for me. (I hardly look like a priest what with my black mask and Plexiglas face shield, a net bonnet hat, surgical gloves and a yellow protective gown with tight wrist bands. It was difficult to get out my anointing ritual and the holy oils.)

I did get to be an unofficial observer of the staff working that night and they were all uniformly good, caring, and eminently patient. The whole unit is for persons suffering from dementia. I have been a relatively frequent visitor to that unit over the years and have seen many of our parishioners there as was the case on Sunday. Finally, once I was completely outfitted I was escorted to the patient's room and she was in a very deep sleep. I sat by her bed and gently laid my hand on her arm which was under the covers and sat and prayed for her what her daughters wanted to pray for her had they been there. I spoke loudly the anointing prayers because often the hearing is still working even when the rest of us isn't able to show forth a response. I prayed for that to be healed in her which was most in need of healing and I told her that the Lord would be coming soon and he would say her name and he would take her by the hand. I told her not to be afraid because he had this great love for her and he wanted her to be with him. I told her to say: "yes Lord." And simply go with him. I anointed her forehead, eyelids, nose and mouth because I didn't have access to her hands.

Afterwards I removed gloves and gown and hat. I sanitized the mask and visor. I thoroughly washed my hands and came home and took a long shower. And got into my PJ's. then went down to get some dinner. And then I called a friend to share the story. The Lord Jesus was in all of that bringing his light. After all, it was the Feast of the Epiphany. He is still being manifested everywhere in this world for those with eyes to see and hearts to believe.

Peace,
Msgr. McHenry