

## COULD THERE BE GRACE AND EVEN GIFT IN COVID?

My mom's doctor used to say that "getting old is not for sissies." I'm in good health and never thought of myself as old, but it seems COVID has turned that perspective upside down. Because I'm in my late 70's I'm deemed "High Risk" and according to my doctor that means no going into the office, no church, shopping or getting together with my extended family. Still I'm one of the lucky ones. I am not sick and have everything I need—warm shelter, food, enough money to pay my bills, and the support of relatives, friends and my faith community

Most people are facing many more challenges. Grocery store and pharmacy clerks and bus and truck drivers suddenly have become essential workers joining doctors, nurses and EMTs working daily in high risk situations. People have lost jobs, struggle to pay bills and provide for daily necessities. Some have gotten sick and recovered; others have died. It is a time like none of us has ever known.

In March and April all most of us could think about was what we would do again once COVID was over. We felt like Sam I am in Green Eggs and Ham: "I do not like COVID restrictions here or there. I do not like them anywhere." Nine months later we still may not like wearing masks, social distancing, and not being with larger groups of family and friends, but we know it's what's needed to keep us safe.

We'd probably all like things to go back to normal (whatever that was) but in the midst of this mess many of us are also discovering grace and opportunity. I know I am. In the course of these months I've connected more with elderly shut-ins and have been blessed by their wisdom and faith. Through more regular phone calls, I've gotten to know other parishioners more deeply. We've shared faith journeys and daily struggles, something none of us probably would have made time for if everything was "normal." We'd be too busy. A weekly Zoom meeting offers a place for parishioners to share reflections on the upcoming Sunday's readings. It's become a holy time of deepening faith sharing. I've discovered that I could still support parishioners in their dying and families in their grief, though not physically there. And most importantly I've grown in understanding and appreciation of Eucharist by praying Sunday Mass on line with my St. Leo family.

The slower pace has allowed time for deepening my relationship with my son Jeremy through daily walks through the neighborhood and discovering natural beauty I often was too busy to notice. My gratitude for the diversity and inclusion of my community and neighbors grows as I see many small acts of kindness.

Though this time is just a blip in one's life, it often feels unending. Like many others I long for closeness with family and friends. I really miss being with my twin grandsons. I haven't seen my son and his family in Baltimore since February and will miss Christmas with them, yet we have grown closer in this time apart. When I text my 14-year-old grandson, he responds and tells me he loves me. Times apart make these things even sweeter. And I believe that once we can hug again, it will be hard to let go.

Nine months of quarantine. A pregnancy is usually nine months and during that time change and new life develops.

Maybe COVID is offering an opportunity for new and deeper spiritual growth and new ways of loving each other by wearing masks, social distancing and intentional time with each other. It's said that in Jesus' time when a woman was pregnant, she went into seclusion to prepare for the gift of new life within her. Maybe in the midst of all the pain and chaos there is grace and even gift.

During this COVID Advent I find myself turning to Mary .and wondering what she must have been thinking and feeling after "the angel left" and her world was forever altered. She was pregnant and unmarried. Joseph was depending on a dream to stay with her. The Romans ran the country and they demanded a census close to when she was to deliver, If Mary and Joseph owned a donkey it would be a bumpy ride to Bethlehem to be counted but they were poor and probably would have to walk most of the way and have no way to pay for lodging once they arrived. Not quite COVID but it certainly changed her plans for her life. It wasn't something she would have chosen, but saying yes and embracing it changed the world forever.

May we have the courage to say Yes as well as we await what God is birthing in us in this time of seeming chaos.

~Angela Anno



## CONGRATULATIONS ...

Sandrine Ilumbu, daughter of Claudette Murekatete and Pierre Igaba will graduate in December from Wright State University with a degree in business management. Good Luck with your future endeavors.

