



reflections on life's similarities and differences between Minnesota and Venezuela

Did you know?

by the Venezuelan Mission of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis



Coronavirus: does this cloud have a silver lining?



You've heard the expression "every cloud has a silver lining". During this time of social distancing, many people who regularly attend Mass have missed the presence of their faith community and feel isolated. To help them stay connected and lift their spirits, I began sending text messages to parishioners, and their replies have been great. During Holy Week I asked them, given the focus on the coronavirus and all the preventive measures being taken, if they had noted any positive side effects. Did this cloud have a silver lining? Here is a sampling of the responses I received.

"We are sharing more time together as a family, learning to value more what is truly important to God, remembering that our priorities in life are not material but spiritual and that God is the only savior of the world."

"Catholic churches are not really closed. On the contrary, we are church in every home united with friends and relatives in prayer, an Our Father, a holy rosary, and in Spiritual Communion with our Lord Jesus Christ."

"We now have time to dedicate ourselves to God without excuses. There is no gasoline and we are not going anywhere. For the first time I am happy that there is no fuel. There is nothing else than to stay at home and keep Holy Week as it ought to be, in vigil and prayer."

"This has been like a great retreat for me. People who previously didn't pay much attention to God are now praying and the world itself is more as God intended, cleaner with less contamination."

"I have reflected on how life is a gift from God. What is important is faith, hope and love, and being more closely bonded with one's neighbor."

"My husband doesn't normally go to church, but he accompanied me listening to the Mass on radio, praying the rosary, and kneeling down with me to read the passion of our Lord."

A friend in Minnesota told me that everyone in her parish has been contacted to see how they are doing and if they need anything. Volunteers are delivering food and medicine to folks who need help. Colored chalk messages have covered sidewalks and plastic Easter eggs decorate walking paths. Birthdays are celebrated by people driving by honking horns. Stories abound of neighbors and strangers looking out for one other.

My sister in St. Paul said she's noticed that people are kinder and more sensitive to one another, making masks and offering them to anyone who needs one, and donating groceries in their pantries to people in need. "I hope all of this continues," she commented, "past the time when 'normalcy' returns."

Skies in many cities are clearer. Fresh water dolphins have returned to petroleum-polluted Lake Maracaibo. My neighbors aren't partying and playing loud music at night. Crime is down. People are more respectful. There is less littering. Streets and parks here in Ciudad Guayana are the cleanest I've seen since returning last July. With gasoline stations shut down, there are far fewer vehicles on the move...great for me and my bicycle. With the precautions in place, fewer people are dying from influenza and other contagious diseases as well.

When Jesus taught the beatitudes (Matthew 5), many disciples probably scratched their heads in wonderment. How could being poor, hungry and thirsty, and mourning be blessings, much less being insulted, persecuted and falsely accused? In and of themselves, they aren't blessings at all. But if in response to those very situations, we become closer to God, more understanding and compassionate toward others, we can, as Jesus put it, "rejoice and be glad". It is only in that bigger picture that we call the day Jesus suffered a horrible death "Good" Friday and the result of his suffering the "victory of the cross". So, as we mourn for those who have died and pray for those who suffer from the coronavirus, remember, even this cloud has a silver lining.

Points to ponder

What positive things do you see happening in your own area as well as on the world scene during this time of focus on the coronavirus and the preventive measures being taken? Can you see a silver lining in all this?

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at ddempsey@churchofst dominic.org or 651-368-7324.