

[I'll be short today. We have our Annual Catholic Appeal speaker after the homily.] "I can hardly wait for things to get back to normal?" Ever heard (or said) that lately? Think of how many things we're missing due to the coronavirus and social distancing. On Mother's Day I had to go over to Mom's and speak to her from the porch, as did my siblings. I'm looking forward to that ending. Obviously, I want masses with a full church to resume. Funerals always seem to come at the most inconvenient times, but now I'm looking forward to being inconvenienced in that way. And I'm sure in your life you have your own longings for the way things were B.C. -- Before COVID.

But I would also ask all of us to take this strange time as an opportunity to examine the changes in our lives these past months brought about by the coronavirus -- as part of a new start in life. There has been a lot of pain and suffering. But there has also been chances to discover that, in some areas, the old, "normal" lives we were leading had some real problems. There really will be no going back completely

to the old normal – and that’s a blessing, because the old normal wasn’t always good for us. Normal isn’t the same as good.

I mean that, first, regarding the big picture of our society. What have we learned as Americans about our society under this stress of the pandemic? What should change? What has changed and should be retained even after things settle down somewhat?

But I’m mostly talking today about in our own lives. What discoveries have we each made about our lives, and what’s important in them? For example, one thing I’ve learned is how many people appreciate the live-streamed masses – especially those who are shut-ins. Why not keep the live-streaming going after the virus? Or, on a more personal note, during these months I’ve taken much more time to pray in church before celebrating mass. It’s been wonderful. How can I retain that prayerful preparation into the future?

Retaining such lessons learned during the quarantine might mean making new priorities that come at a cost, or that others might resist.

But remember the Gospel. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it.” In this Easter Season we’re heading towards Pentecost and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus tells us, if we let Him, the Holy Spirit will change our lives in ways the world doesn’t understand.

In my own spiritual life, the Easter season is a real trap. Lent is a time of focus, sacrifice, and spiritual fervor. But then comes Easter and it all melts away. I go back to my old ways (or worse). Yes, Easter is a time of celebration. But all too often I turn it into a time of indulgence, telling myself, “It’s Easter after all. Why not?” I’m afraid that this same thing what will happen to us when the restrictions of the virus are finally lifted. It will be like shouting, “Easter time! Forget about the lessons and healthy changes we made this hard Spring.” But that is the world speaking – and the world doesn’t understand the Holy Spirit.

This Quarantine has been like a really long Lent. During it, have your prayer time or other spiritual practices grown? Has your family time increased? Are your meals homier? Are you healthier (all those walks!)? We've experienced lots of bad things – but don't forget the good changes. The Spirit has used this time to shake up our lives for the better in many ways.

The old Normal wasn't always good for us. This has been a time of humility, simplicity, even poverty, in many ways. Those are virtues we can always use more of. So, today, as we draw closer to Pentecost, let us ask ourselves, "What is the Holy Spirit telling me not to go back to when the new normal comes?"