

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Feb 28th 2016

Make the effort to lead a simple life. That was my plan for my Lenten journey. Inspired by Pope Francis's recent encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care of our Common Home*, I could see a variety of ways I could make intentional efforts toward simplicity. My menus were carefully planned to include meals with simple ingredients and no food waste. I evaluated my consumer habits and had thought of ways to reduce my consumption of goods. Sharing items which no longer have use for me but could be useful to someone else is a regular habit of mine yet I was able to look at my belongings with a fresh eye.

And then it hit. A virulent flu virus that has knocked me down for two weeks and counting. All of my virtuous plans went out the window. Being humbled by this illness has presented the opportunity for prayer and reflection. I turn to today's readings to guide me through my prayer. Today's second reading from Corinthians offers quite a caution: All ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ.

Yet God was not pleased with most of them for they were struck down in the desert. While the intention of this passage is to be a warning, my first reaction is to feel afraid that I am doomed. That fear is an unusual feeling for me as the refrain of today's Psalm speaks to my image of God: The Lord is Kind and Merciful.

Yet my richest encounters with God come when I am willing to open myself up and explore uncomfortable feelings. In a strange way, I believe my illness and the sense of vulnerability has helped me be more open to staying with the discomfort which is a lesson I will take with me. So I turn to today's Gospel from Luke in which Jesus speaks about the Galileans: If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! My handy dictionary defines repent as: to feel or show that you are sorry for something bad or wrong that you did and that you want to do what is right. This definition gives me hope. To repent is a process. And Jesus beautifully describes that process in today's Gospel with the parable of the gardener and fig tree. Again I turn to my dictionary and learn that cultivate is defined as: to grow or raise something under conditions that you can control. Again I have a feeling of hope. Jesus is urging me to take responsibility and to be intentional with my actions.

Being left with little feeling of control over the past couple of weeks due to my illness helps me understand that we are not expected to control everything. Although I was ill, I simply needed to honor my responsibilities to the best of my ability. I made every effort to clearly communicate that (most) of my projects would be completed but at a later date. I let some things go. I let people who offered assistance help me.

When I pray about my Lenten journey on this third Sunday of Lent, I realize that the simplicity I needed in my life was a simplified schedule. Having fewer obligations has helped me be more prayerful. I have been more aware of the gifts in my life. The people who are dear to me are better appreciated. And I am more aware of my reactions to people who challenge me as when I am not feeling well I have less capacity to mask my true feelings.

With steadfast belief that our Lord is kind and merciful I am ready to repent and to cultivate a deeper resolve to better serve the kingdom of God.

Mary Lee Brock-Creighton University's Warner Institute