

Dear People of God,

One thing that I have found myself doing during this prolonged “stay at home” season is remembering important relationships that are often neglected. I received some unexpected emails from friends and some relatives of mine. I wrote a very special note to one of my uncles whose wife died a short while ago, telling him what he and his wife Mary meant to me. I have never reached out to them in that way. Some friends saw the Easter Mass on our website and emailed me. Connected again. I’ve been writing more notes to people that I otherwise would not normally. I’m remembering especially some friends and relatives who are at particular risk of this virus because of age or infirmity, and I want them to know that I care.

A more concerning part of the response to this pandemic has been observing how some of our fellow citizens have been interpreting the idea of “*freedom*” in our country, which is not *nearly* the same thing as what the bible describes as **Christian human freedom**. One of my priest friends—Fr. Mike Byron—states that our Catholic tradition has understood this distinction for a very long time, but it’s rarely been so evidently in need of clarification as it is now.

He went on to say that often the immediate American understanding of the word **freedom** is something like “*the uninhibited liberty to do whatever I want for whatever reasons I choose.*” It’s been kind of baked into our culture for a few hundred years. But it’s *not* Christian! Mike goes on to say that when Jesus and Paul and Peter and others in the New Testament speak about freedom, they talk about the ability to embrace the kind of life that we are all summoned to, without the restrictions that sin or law impose upon us. **Biblical “freedom” means that there is nothing that can keep us from knowing, loving, and following God, and from finding our place in the community of our fellow human beings.** Jesus’ teaching on freedom does not devolve into a *consideration of “me and what I prefer.” It is much larger than that. It’s about the uninhibited ability to do as I should, in Christian responsibility—which necessarily includes the welfare of all others around me, and of creation.*

There’s been a disturbing amount of “*freedom equals me*” cropping up all over, amid the stress of all that we are enduring just now. That may be understandable in a moment of fear, but it is our responsibility as believers to respond with something *better* than that, something more *Christian*. It is not about me and mine, but about *us*.

You will be receiving our Newsletter this week that will lay out the “phased” approach to gradually opening our church. We must follow the directive of our governor as well as our bishop. We are NOT free to disregard them. Why? Because it is better to have parishioners who are alive. Some may say this is nonsense. However, until we have someone you know die with the virus’ horrid complications, we don’t know what the disease can do. It hit home to me this week. One of the priests with whom I served died of covid-related symptoms. He was on a ventilator after having tested positive for Covid-19. The mother-in-law one of our staff members died this week as well. May they rest in peace.

Our custodians and some great volunteers have been working feverishly to clean the pews, strip them down, then re-stain and seal them with 4 coats so that they can withstand the sanitizing that must be done after every service. I am most grateful.

Fr. Steve