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Protagoras Paradox & COVID-19

By Don Aguiar

Over 2000 years ago, in Greece, there was a lawyer named Protagoras. A young student, Euthalos, requested to apprentice under him, but was unable to pay the fees. The student struck a deal saying, "I will pay your fee the day I win my first case in the court". Teacher agreed. When the training was complete and a few years had elapsed without the student paying up, the teacher decided to sue the student in the court of law.

The teacher thought to himself: 'If I win the case, as per the law, the student will have to pay me, as the case is about non-payment of dues. And if I lose the case, the student will still have to pay me, because he would have won his first case. Either way I will get paid'.

The student's view was, 'If I win the case, I won't have to pay the teacher, as the case is about my non-payment of fees. And if I lose the case, I don't have to pay him since I wouldn't have won my first case yet. Either way I will not pay the teacher.'

This is known as Protagoras Paradox, whichever way you look both have equally convincing arguments, and one can go either way in supporting the teacher or the student and would not be wrong.

Those in medical practice often come across such situations, either in making a diagnostic or therapeutic decision. One physician can recommend a course of treatment based on scientific evidence and another can recommend a diametrically opposite course again based on medical evidence. Right or wrong, but some merit would exist on both sides. Often the physician himself is having an internal struggle to make a decision about the most appropriate course of action, Protagoras & Euthalos are arguing in his mind, to do this or to do that. The horns of dilemma are tearing him apart.

A tweet by Donald Trump, 'hope the cure is not worse than the disease'.

Some merit in this tweet. In our global attempt to flatten the COVID curve, hope we do not flatten the global economy curve.

The question is what the best way forward is. One group recommends 'total lockdown' to break the transmission chain, based on evidence from China, they managed to control the spread of the virus by ruthless lock down and 3 months later they are showing that disease is controlled in Wuhan.

On the other hand, the other school of thought is graded isolation & protection of elderly and very young and those with co-morbidities, let it spread amongst the young and healthy, after all the disease ultimately will be controlled when we achieve 'herd immunity'.

The medical community is divided in these two groups. To enforce complete lockdown or Graded isolation?

To complicate the issue the epidemiologists have joined the bandwagon with cacophony of statistical analysis. From Rosy to Dooms day predictions. If we don't do a complete lockdown then a million people will die in one year. No say some more like 90 million will die in one year. Whose data analysis is correct?

Some suggest do nothing, nature will take over in a few months and all will be well, they quote historical data to justify their recommendations.

On whose inputs should we base our disaster management strategy?

Then come the economists with their doomsday predictions. If this continues till May our medical resources will be overwhelmed, Agriculture will suffer, food shortages will occur, production will come to a standstill. There will

be an economic crisis of the proportions that world has not seen ever. So, break this lockdown nonsense and let's get back to work as usual.

What will our political masters do? My guess is they will listen to medical experts, epidemiologists & economists. Then they will decide what course of action will ensure their survival, what will get them people's votes and they will run with that. At present 'Lockdown' finds favour with them.

Modi in India and Boris in UK had



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(Contd.. from p. 2)

to abandon the recommendations of the medical community about graded response, because the people's perception became that "our Government is not doing enough to protect us citizens". That means revolt against them. So, screw it, let's go with total lockdown if that's what the people want. Gradually people will get tired of lockdown and demand - let life go on. Then with equally convincing arguments the governments will say the time has now come to lift the blockade, we have controlled the contagion, and we have won.

Incidentally the Protagoras Paradox has not been resolved till date.

At the time of writing this, India is in a total lockdown. The streets are empty, trains and flights are not running, schools, offices and factories are shut. We are trying to fight a global pandemic, which even the richest, most developed nations are finding hard to beat.

The Covid-19 coronavirus, which can grow exponentially was stalled in China with the help of similar lockdowns. No wonder big parts of Europe and the US are following the same model to stop the virus.

Fear is overriding emotion right now. We cannot control the virus. We don't have a vaccine for it yet. We know it can kill particularly old people. We also know it transmits easily. It may slow down on its own. Hot weather may calm it a bit. Certain drugs may work, someone might invent a vaccine - we just don't know when and how all this will happen. Faced with such uncertainty, the natural human response is fear. To counter this fear we want to do everything we can. Because after all, what is more important than life.

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Is There Baby Left In The Bath Water?

-Fr. Michael G., Vasai.

In the 4th April issue of 'Secular Citizen' Chhotebhai concludes his article entitled '*Was Jesus Religious?*' with adages- *Don't cut your nose to spite your face, or throw the baby out with the bath water.* He defends the need of '*both Religion and Spirituality*' and asserts his own conclusion, '*Jesus was both a religious and a spirit filled person.*'

I want to share my experiences regarding the practice of spirituality in Catholic religion. What is spirituality? I set aside the descriptive definitions of spirituality. I am not content with just pious and virtuous life as spirituality. I consider the highest goal of spirituality, that is the total *realization of one's spirit.* Jesus reaches that realisation and declares, "*I am He!*" (Jn 8.24, 28). He claimed himself to be God (Jn 10.33-34). He goes further and declares, '*Those to whom God's word is addressed are gods*' (Ps 81.6). Jesus has invited all of us to realise the oneness with Him and the Father, like the oneness of the *vine and its branches* (Jn 15.1, 10) Once a person realises this oneness, the Spirit flows through his body and mind. Extraordinary powers and happiness flow through him as we see in Jesus (Jn 15.11). Am I speaking of mysticism? Well, that is the 'fullness of life' offered to every one of us by Jesus and the Church is supposed to help us achieve it! I would survey three areas where the Church has failed in this regard.

Novenas:

Every religion is supposed to help adherents to realize their spiritual nature. In my experience, we Catholics are mostly lost in piety and emotionalism. Let us take one glaring example of our novena services. I may be wrong but in my opinion, they are far from true spirituality. Jesus said, "*Ask anything in my name and the Father will grant it to you*" (Jn 15. 7). Jesus invites us directly and we are lost in mediators like Mary and saints! In fact, the best time to make petitions to God directly is the prayers of the Faithful in the Mass; but the novena prayer comes after the Mass as a tail! Many faithful value novena more than the Eucharist. Above all, why ask God for anything except spiritual growth? Do we need to pray at all, when Jesus has assured us that the Father knows our needs before we ask and has already granted them all? (Mt 6.8) Many times petitions are exerting pressure on God to grant whereas real prayer is a surrender before God as Mary did in the words, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word!*" I am afraid, devotees go at pilgrim centres like Vellankani mostly for mundane benefits. Even prayers and penances offered there are for selfish purposes than for becoming spirit-

filled persons! A long list of superstitious, unspiritual and even unethical activities performed at such pilgrim centres can be drawn. Can the Church authorities at least discourage such empty ritualism? Very hard! For centuries theologians and reformers have tried it but the pietistic tendency is so deep rooted that spirituality does not occur to the faithful! The clergy seems to condone saying, "*allow them to live their simple faith!*" How long to keep them at that level? My strong summons against selfish, superstitious novena mentality, precisely at novena services, are not heeded; but rather just 'tolerated' as a 'penance' to obtain a favour from Mother Mary in return!

The Eucharist:

The Eucharistic celebration is the sacrament that transforms us into Christ. In the Mass we offer ourselves, we 'die' with Jesus and rise anew with Christ (1Co 18-21). "*One who keeps my word will never see death.*" (Jn 8.51). But in fact the ritual is treated as an 'object' offered to 'please' God so that in return He may reward us with some bonanza! A list of intentions is read out just before the Mass begins. They are accepted at some fix rate. The impression given is that the Eucharist can be bought and sold as a 'commodity'! Faithful go home with a belief that they have one more ritual registered in their account, which will be rewarded in heaven after death! The family imagines that the more masses are offered for their dear deceased ones, the faster they will enter heaven! In fact, the Eucharist is a *furnace* where individual 'burns' himself and comes out as a pure 'spirit'! Sorry to say, the Church (Or we priests?) is far from spiritual formation of the laity.

Interior religion:

The faithful have to realize their oneness with God by practicing interior religion taught by Jesus himself. They have to worship God not on this or that mountain but in spirit and truth! (Jn 4.21, 23). Worshipper has to enter into the cave of his heart and search the answer to the question: *Who am I?* In Indian tradition one realizes his divinity by the *Sadhana* of '*Neti Neti*'. He begins by realizing what he is not and finally realizes what he is! *Sadhaka* has to first realize that he is not just body, not just mind, not even just soul but beyond all that, he is HE, the *Paramatma*. All this self-search is done through meditation/ *dhyaan*. How much place does meditation get in our religious rituals? Not even enough silence is observed! Retreats are more moral exhortations and catechism learning. The faithful are kept busy with external religious activities and with a feeling that now what remains is a reward in heaven after death! Scientific understanding of





Can your weapons save now?

World over leaders of different countries spend billions of Rupees for weapons of mass destruction.

Can these weapons save your own people from Coronavirus? Think

—Herbert D. Barretto,
Mumbai

(Contd.. from p. 4)

religion remains far from them! Heaven is not a place but rather a state of our Spirit at death. The closeness to God decides our heaven, hell or purgatory. If one tries to give the congregation a scientific outlook on religious matters he is told, 'Do not scandalize the *simple folk!*' We are taught a lot of Bible stories, religious rituals and models of virtues, hardly any spiritual exercise. There is more information than formation, much less spiritual formation!

Mr Chhotebhai wanting to save religions has ended his article by quoting an adage, *do not throw baby with the bath water.* I am afraid, *there is no baby left behind in the bath water.* Thanks to Corona! We are out of the churches in these lockdown days. The situation is leading people to live without rituals, without external religiosity and to try out interior religion in the temple of our body and mind. We are forced to live this Lenten season and especially the Holy Week without emotionally satisfying devotions. We are given a chance to remain 'isolated', to pray in the silence of our closed rooms (Mt. 5.6) and 'realise' the closeness to God who dwells in the temple of our hearts (1 Co 6.19-20, 15.44-45).

Om Shanti!

China must pay reparations

While it may not be fair to call it a "Chinese Disease", Caronavirus certainly originated in China and spread from China, because of Chinese negligence and cussedness. In fact Dr Li Wenliang who called out the virus as early as December 2019, was investigated by the Chinese authorities for 'rumour mongering' and warned 'not to make false comments'. China wasted precious time in trying to cover up the spread and magnitude of the virus and owned up only when the situation got out of control. Hence China must take full responsibility for the pandemic and must be made to pay reparations for causing untold misery and suffering to millions across the world

China must be made to pay \$1 million for every fatality and \$1,00,000 for every Covid-19 positive case across the world, failing which a complete embargo on Chinese goods must be imposed worldwide. China has a humongous cache of reserves amounting to \$3.4 trillion (\$ 3,400 billion). The total payout will amount to only a few hundred billion dollars--- a small fraction of its reserves.

—Prof Robert Castellino
Mumbai

We need prophets to intercede with God

Corona-virus is on the warpath ---rampant in Italy, France , Spain, U. S. and U. K. with a daily rise in the number of people testing +ve and increase in the number of daily

deaths. Prayers are being offered all over the world by people of all faiths for a speedy end to the pandemic and a return to normal life. Yet there are no visible or encouraging signs of the virus loosening its hold on all types of people , the high and mighty, the rich and poor, the young and old, the good and the bad, all, without distinction. Nobody knows what God has in mind and what he requires of us. It is unfortunate that we live in times unlike those in the Old Testament days when prophets interceded with God in times of calamity and God came to their help. Abraham pleaded with God to save Sodom and Gomorrah if there were just 50 good people , and God agreed. Unable to find even 10 , God was forced to destroy both Sodom and Gomorrah , but saved the lives of Lot, his wife, and two daughters. Moses interceded with God every time the Israelites faced problems in the desert , and God came to their rescue, until He settled them later in the promised land. Today, do we have anyone of the stature of the Old Testament prophets? Can anyone tell us in like manner what God requires of us to bring to an early end the scourge of the killer Corona -virus?. We would only be too happy to oblige.

—A. F. Nazareth
Alto Porvorim

Keep Corona Away

Wearing masks is one of the preventive measures against Coronavirus. Avoiding cold drinks and ice creams is necessary while getting more sunlight, fresh air and keeping good personal hygiene are some of the measures that can keep Coronavirus away.

— Jubel D'Cruz,
Mumbai

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WHETHER INDIA AS A NATION CAN CONTAIN THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID 19?

by Eric D'Sa

The government must focus on health and livelihood issues at the same time, as the COVID-19 pandemic has effectively brought normal life to a sudden halt in India. Whether there was a need for such a sudden halt and lockdown all over the country of more than 130 million people with just 4 hours notice is debatable. The importance of social distancing and a lockdown in curbing the spread of the virus cannot be stressed enough, but these measures also have huge repercussions on livelihoods and the economy at large, which has already been seeing a slowdown over the past year.

This is the mother of all challenges in recent human memory. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says that the 2008 financial crisis comes close, but many economists around the world think that this is much bigger than that. Possibly, one has to go to the times of the Great Depression. Even qualitatively, it's a very different challenge, because first you have to save lives, then you have to save livelihoods, then you have to meet with other costs like loss of jobs and production, and supply chain disruptions. It's not just confined to one sector or country; it encompasses the entire economy of the world.

So, there seems to be no immediate policy instrument that a nation can put in place because you don't even know how long the problem will last. The depth of the problem that you are going to face is dependent on the length of the period for which you are going to close down and the extent to which the virus spreads. We seem to have over estimated our capacity to prevent the spread of the virus after first neglecting the entry of the virus into the country, by not strictly enforcing a 14 day isolation period under proper supervision of every rich Indian who came back into the country from middle of January. Just testing for temperature of the person entering the country at the airport was inadequate.

Every country is either already deeply

affected or is at the start of being more affected. This is unprecedented in terms of its immediate impact on the lives of individuals from all walks of life. We have a few additional factors in India, an economy which relies very heavily on informal employment. So our reliance for people's well-being depends heavily on the broader economy performing and the markets performing, whatever role the state may try to play. And anything that the government tries to change suddenly in the functioning of the economy has unintended effects.

We sometimes have a tendency to act and then plan. For example, on Saturday,

YOU THE CITIZENS DECIDE:

all companies in Mumbai including manufacturing ones were told suddenly to shut down. On Sunday, all trains including suburban ones were stopped. And on Monday, all companies were told, 'Look, you must keep supporting your staff and contract workers.' The daily and temporary worker was left to decide overnight what he had to do in the absence of any employment for three weeks.

The country ended up with what we saw on Saturday and Sunday, which is thousands of people crowding into train and bus stations, trying to head out of town, potentially spreading the virus across the country. This is obviously an unintended consequence. We sometimes act first without going into what we actually want to achieve. The way to achieve 'social distancing' is not to announce something suddenly, which then brings large crowds of people together in a panic, to do something for their own security, well-being and immediate survival. A little bit of thought before we acted would have really helped.

Over the last few days, both the formal and informal sector have come to a virtual halt. Lakhs of truckers are held up across States and most manufacturing firms have shut down. The lockdown may have

been the right thing to do for the country. But whether it should have been done a bit earlier, with sufficient warning given for vulnerable daily and temporary wagers, and the aged living in cities in one room tenements, to go home to the safety of their own villages will be debated in the future.

How do you then limit the economic impact and who do you need to buffer the impact for? Without question, it is the people who are most vulnerable, those who live from day to day and have no savings to fall back on. Then you look at medium to small companies with very limited staying power. The only way they can actually survive is by not paying people. We don't want that to happen. Otherwise we will spread that distress in the economy. The government needs to address their concerns, either through moratoriums on principal and interest payments or direct salary support, as we've seen happen in the U.K., Switzerland and France, to ensure some employment is sustained.

.One of the biggest problems in the system is the capacity of the state to deal with this sudden new rapidly spreading illness. The reaction that we have is a knee-jerk reaction. Today, you cannot worry about issues such as fiscal deficit. You have to save people's lives. There is a 21-day lockdown and redistribution is a major issue. Thankfully, we have in the country a much better targeting device, the Jan-Dhan accounts and Adhaar.

For a start we need to recognise that we have very limited state capacity, and once we recognise that then we can think about how to get the desired outcome of ensuring what the state has promised to do of providing to the poor sufficient food to avoid starvation and a bit of money into their hands to meet their immediate needs. Besides what the state can do we the Citizens who are better placed and living in reality comfort will have to rise to the occasion of being charitable, to reduce the economic impact a poor nation like ours would be facing in the coming weeks and months.

News Media Plays A Pivotal Role

by *C.K.Subramaniam*

The fundamental right of a resident to receive a hard copy of the newspaper, the pleasure of flipping through it with a cup of coffee is really a tremendous feeling in the early morning hours. Further, there is no restriction on distribution of newspapers, it is included in essential services. So, no one should hinder distribution of newspapers. In this world of social media, where gossip and propaganda are elevated, to the status of gospel, the printed word on a responsible newspaper is clearly an essential service, particularly in these war like situation. News media plays a pivotal role.

Media is the “fourth estate” of democracy and it plays a pivotal role in ensuring justice and benefits of the government policies reach the interior sections of the society. They act as a chain between the government and the citizens of the country, people have faith in media as it has an impact on the audience. Media has played a significant role in establishing democracy throughout the world. Since the 18th century, the media has been instrumental in reaching the masses and equipping them with knowledge, especially during the American Independence movement and French Revolution. Media is considered as “Fourth Pillar” in democratic countries along with Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary, as without a free media democratic system cannot cease to exist.

For more than two centuries in this country, newspapers have been used in classroom instruction. Although innovative teachers probably enhanced instruction with newspapers since they were first printed, the earliest known reference to newspapers as tools for learning appeared in the Portland Eastern Herald of Maine on June 8, 1795. Since then newspapers are part and parcel of the curriculum and serve as an educational tool.

Much has been said and written on the utility of newspapers; but one principal advantage which might be derived from these publications has been neglected; we mean that of reading them in schools, and by the children in families. Try it for one session. Do you wish your child to improve in reading solely, give him a newspaper; it furnishes a variety, some parts of which must indelibly touch his fancy. Do you wish to instruct him in geography, nothing will so indelibly fix the relative situation of different places, as the stories and events published in the papers. In time, do you wish to have him acquainted with the manners of the country or city, the mode of doing business, public or private; or do you wish him to

have a smattering of every kind of science useful and amusing, give him a newspaper. Newspapers are plenty and cheap, the cheapest book that can be bought, and the more you buy the better for your children, because every part furnishes valuable information.

During election time and newspapers play a pivotal role in bringing the political parties to the fore and peak at the right time. Photographs bursts in the first page with catchy captions and rebuttal from the political leaders. News papers play a pivotal role in politics and more so in our regular life. It is indeed a time for news in early morning hours. Some people even skip their morning coffee but never forget to read the newspaper. Even though e-paper is available in the net for most of the newspapers people prefer to buy newspaper and browse through at home and even take it to office for a thorough study. newspapers are the backbone of the country and the fulcrum round which the universe is functioning.

We still remember that during our college days we find that the typewriting institute instructors instructed us to follow The Hindu newspaper script for dictation in shorthand and typing so that we can improve our English. Again, the sports lovers were engrossed to go through the pages of The Hindu for gaining sports language for their early study of the subject. Thus the basic education and language building was done through newspaper reading. Even though the reading habit is dying down there are still good number of local and national newspapers to browse through from the stalls in every nook and corner of the city.

Media became a source of information for the citizens of colonial India, as they became aware of the arbitrariness of the British colonial rule. Thus, gave a new found force to India’s Independence movement, as millions of Indians joined the leaders in their fight against the British imperialism. The role of media in Indian democracy has undergone massive changes, from the days of press censorship during Emergency in 1975 to being influential in the coming 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The older generation of the country is still fixated on tradition and culture, while the present-day youth is more interested in the fast-moving world of technology and social media. Thus, it becomes important for media to ensure that the information that they are broadcasting should not be a biased or tampered in a way to boost the channels TRP. There lies the real success of the news media and the newspapers are the backbone of this country.

Neither Tokenism nor Panic Can Help Counter this Unique Crisis

by Don Aguiar.

Modi's first speech on the virus, got us to scare evil spirits away by having us bang our pans. With his second, he scared the hell out of all of us. With no words on how the poor are to access food & other essentials it sparked off a panic waiting to happen. The middle class thronged the stores and markets – something not easy for the poor. Not for migrants leaving the cities for their villages. Not for small vendors, domestic help, agricultural labourers. Not for farmers unable to complete the rabbi harvest – or stuck with it even if they have. Not for hundreds of millions of marginalised Indians.

The Modi government was quicker than most in closing its borders. But the serious lapse has been a lack of sufficient testing leaving us with no exact idea of the scale and spread of the virus. The tests were initially confined to those who had returned to India from one of the affected countries or to people who had come into contact with such travellers and were showing symptoms. "Virus detectives," as they have come to be colloquially known, did an efficient job of hunting down those who may have come into contact with a covid-19 exposed individual.

But this is a giant country with a dense population and gaping inequities. Once the virus hits different communities, contact tracing may become impossible. According to the 2011 Census, 92 million households live in one-room homes and an additional 78 million in two-room houses. In many places, social distancing is a purely theoretical concept.

The next 15 days could decide India's next 15 years, as Modi himself conceded. During this extraordinary challenge, the prime minister should reach out to political rivals and make them part of the coronavirus response.

India's poor will need the government's urgent focus. The security guard; the municipal sweeper and rag pickers who will not get one day off; the migrant workers with no roof over their heads; and the small shopkeepers who are keeping supply lines going — they will all need significant economic assistance.

How raising loan limits for self-help groups change a situation where getting an existing loan amount is a nightmare? And how exactly will this 'package' help those countless migrant workers stranded far away, trying to return to their home villages?

The claim that it will help migrants is unsubstantiated. If the failure to produce a serious set of emergency measures is alarming, the attitude of the packagers is terrifying. They seem clueless on the kind of situation developing on the ground.

Lockdowns of the kind we are into – with no serious social support or planning for the vulnerable – can lead, perhaps already have led, to reverse migrations. It is impossible to get a fix on the extent or intensity of those. But reports from several states suggest that large numbers of people are heading back towards their villages as the cities and towns they work in, are in lockdown.

Many are using the only transportation now available – their own feet. Some are cycling home. Several find themselves stranded midway when trains, buses and vans stop functioning. It's scary, the kind of hell that might break loose if this intensifies.

They might fall to age-old diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and other.

Besides, the kind of situation that could build up with this mounting economic distress would see those deaths very largely amongst the working and younger populations.

The whole lockdown process as it is being rolled out is even displacing other essential health services – so, along with this economic distress, we may end up substituting deaths from other diseases for coronavirus deaths.

Many migrants live on their worksites. As the sites shut down, and they're asked to leave – where will they go? Not all of them can walk gigantic distances. They have no ration cards –

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how will you reach food to them?

The economic distress is already picking up speed.

Somehow, the better off and middle class seem convinced that if we stay at home and practise social distancing, all will be well. That, at least, we will be insulated from the virus. There is no recognition of how the economic distress will work its way back to us. For several, 'social distancing' resonates differently. We invented its most powerful form nearly two millennia ago – caste. Class and caste factors seem embedded in our kind of lockdown response.

The idea that we're fighting just one virus, and all will be fine once we're on top of it – is dangerous. Sure, we need to fight COVID-19 desperately – this could be the worst pandemic ever since 1918 and the misnamed 'Spanish Flu.'

One of the most striking common features among many thousands of households hit by farmers' suicides across India is this: outrageous health expenditures, often funded by borrowing from the moneylender.

We have the largest population that is least equipped to cope with a crisis like COVID-19. As for COVID-19, there are two ways this can go. The virus mutates (to our advantage) and dies out in weeks. Or: it mutates to its own advantage, worsening the trend. That happens, all hell breaks loose.

We cannot afford to forget the lessons of the past: The 1918 flu pandemic infected a third of the world's population and killed about 17 million people in India, 6 per cent of the population.

The prime minister needs to put aside mindless spending, for instance the project to redesign the heart of Delhi, while the country confronts what could be an existential crisis.

Every single rupee must be devoted to the health-care system and fiscal stimulus for the economy. Or else, the moral question before India will be the one raised by a contract worker as he began a 247-kilometer walk to his village. "Are only the poor going to die?"

Put the 'Divine Mercy Image' on your doors!

The Marian Fathers of the *National Shrine of the Divine Mercy, at Stubeville, USA*, request you to install the 'Divine Mercy Image' on your front door; so as to protect your family against the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

Father Chris Alar quotes from the Diary of St Faustina the promises of Jesus: "The soul that will venerate or honor this Image will never perish" (Diary: 47-8). "By means of this Image I shall grant many graces to souls; so let every soul have access to it" (Diary: 1570). "I promise victory to the soul over its enemies here on earth; and especially at the hour of death, to defend the soul as My own glory" (Diary: 47-8).



Father Alar reveals: "It reminds us of that first Passover, when God told Moses to mark the Israelites' doorposts with the blood of lambs; so that the angel of death that was about to inflict punishment on the Egyptians, would pass over those doors marked with the blood, and leave the Jews safe" (Exodus: Chapter 12).

Father Alar further affirms: "Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God, Who by the out-pouring of His Blood and Water on the Cross, freed us from eternal death, and sealed us for eternal life! The 'Divine Mercy Image' represents the Lord, the Lamb sacrificed for us, from Whose Heart flows the Blood (Eucharist) and the Water (Holy Spirit) – symbolizing streams of God's mercy flowing on the whole world."

—Dr. Trevor Colaso,
Bandra (W), Mumbai.

The Light at the end of the Tunnel!

Easter Invocation: God's Gift To Humanity

By Melvyn Brown

There is no doubt that the coronavirus has today assumed gigantic proportions. Most nations of the world have declared a Lockdown and are busy grappling with this virus. They are at their wit's end as to how to contain this life threatening virus. Normal life has been thrown out of gear. All functions including religious functions have been cancelled. For us Christians, this situation seems to have come perhaps at the most inappropriate time.

How do we look at this Lockdown period? Is it only a time of helplessness? Or abandonment? Are we asking ourselves, where is God? How is God allowing all this to happen? With all places of worship closed how do we pray? What about Lent, Holy Week, Easter - all caught up in this Lockdown. Understandably, we are all agitated.

Looking at it from a different perspective, hasn't this period of Lockdown brought the family together?

We are now following Masses & other services together, on the internet. The question is, what is God trying to tell us through this difficult situation?

It's time for us to introspect. Like many others, I have been following the Redemptorists Missions relayed on YOUTUBE. The Missions challenged us to roll the stone away from the entrance of our hearts - the stone of selfishness, greed, lust, jealousy, other vices that block the way to our hearts.

In this period of Lockdown, we were also made aware through the Missions, that WE, are the Church. The stones, the bricks, the building is not the Church. The Churches around may be closed for prayers but that should not prevent us from following the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Missions dwelt on several topics like family, marriage, etc., giving us broader insight on the Christian faith.

One can only hope that this dark period would soon end. After every Good Friday there is Easter. Jesus said, He is the Light. We are presently going through a dark tunnel but we should be rest assured that there is always a Light at the end of the Tunnel. And that is JESUS CHRIST!



Melville X. D'Souza
- Orlem, Malad West

The Resurrection of our Lord is an unquestioning adherence of faith and trust. Disbelievers may be mystified at first like the disciple who went inside the tomb and came out believing.

The Resurrection is truly the foundation of Christian belief. The faithful have an inherent trust in Christ. It was instilled in the community by the words of Jesus: "that they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee; that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me". (Jn.17:21).

The Messiah was indeed, the Son of God. Documentation on the death and resurrection of the Redeemer provides enough proof 'that the world may believe'.

In the Book of Acts we are informed, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Acts.10:38).

Easter was the only celebration the Church observed for the first three centuries. It is a day for monumental happenings: The Risen Lord; the empty tomb. The entrance stone mysteriously rolled away. Roman soldiers asleep. A strange stillness hangs in the early morning darkness. Mary Magdalene looks inside the crypt, amazed. It is an arcane event for that moment in time.

The First Easter is also the first day of the week. St. John writes about Jesus having said earlier: "The world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn.17:21). Jesus' Resurrection is God's divine gift to all mankind, Said Peter (Acts 10:34).

The temple of God had been destroyed and rebuilt in three days. (Mt.26:61). This is the cornerstone of the faith.

Furthermore, Jesus died on the most important festival of the Jewish people, the Passover. It was a symbolic passage of crossing over from the Old to the New Covenant of spiritual life. Christ was the Lamb of God offered up for our freedom.

Easter is celebrated on Sunday because Christ was raised on the first day of the week. Easter can be on any Sunday falling between MARCH 23 to APRIL 25. The Lord is truly Risen and will stay with them till his Ascension.

The Easter Lamb is the symbol of the Christian faith along with the earlier sign of the fish, which was popular in the Middle Ages, especially in Europe. And later it was the Holy Cross across the earth. The white trumpet flower, the lily, known as the Easter lilies is a popular Easter decoration in Christian homes and in churches.

Easter means 'new life', apply it to your family and relatives. Forgive and forget where things might have gone wrong and bond with each other and one another. Look at the Crucifix and at the Catholic luminaries to be one with Christ: "That the world may believe".(Jn.17:21).

Christifying cyberspace during corona closedown

By Francis Gonsalves

Pune, April 5, 2020: Call it closedown or lockdown or what you will, but this global lockdown is certainly not a shutdown for proclaiming Christ. Rather, I believe that—just as the religious spirit swelled post 9/11 in the USA—COVID-19 is likely to see a surge in spiritual and religious activity by end-2020.

Evangelist John writes, “The Spirit blows where it wills” (Jn 3:8). While human crowns crumble and microbial coronas—Latin, meaning, crowns—press a crown of thorns upon our swollen heads, worldwide, can God’s Spirit be quarantined? Certainly not! Indeed, while church-doors remain shut, the Church of Christ founded upon Peter, the Rock, and Spirit-steered by his successor, Francis, continues to courageously proclaim Christ to urbi et orbi: church and world.

March 27, seeing an aging Pope Francis trudging up the steps of San Pietro was heartrending. Yet, heartwarming were his words: “It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary, often forgotten, people: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests and many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by oneself.”

Pope Francis’ words inspired me to make meaning of what’s happening, goaded of course by WhatsApp, which nowadays indiscriminately serves out more bytes than one can bite, leave alone digest.

Nonetheless, true to the saying: “When all doors are closed, God opens out windows,” computer Windows are not only doling out clips, pics, jokes, surveys, Tik-Toks and COVID-19 do’s and don’ts but also refreshing doses of religion, spirituality and Masses online.

Disappointed at having to cancel an already-announced Lenten Recollection at St. Xavier’s Church, Pune, where I regularly preside over Mass, and unable to animate Holy Week services I’d accepted, I felt that I must do something, albeit small. The repeated “Why don’t you post stuff online?” requests from friends, students and parishioners got me recording ‘Holy Week Homilies for the Homebound’, i.e., eight homilies spanning Passion Sunday to Easter Sunday.

Holy Week Homebound Homilies dwell on the follow-

ing subthemes: (i) Palms [open hands] Sunday; (ii) Bethany Monday; (iii) Chrism Tuesday; (iv) Discipleship Wednesday; (v) Host at Table Thursday; (vi) Suffering and Forgiving Friday; (vii) Silent Saturday; (viii) Easter Sunday—Turning the World Upside Down. I have also felt the need to promote music and singing among the faithful, especially the youth. Hence, dusty and rusty though my violin and guitar strings are, I have ventured to add some music to the homilies, which the viewers can sing during the day.

Creative cyberspace evangelizing, I believe, is the need of the hour. Masses on rooftops, telephonic confessions, priests walking along alleys blessing the sick with the monstrance, online missions by Redemptorists, lifeline retreats by religious congregations, Masses online by bishops and priests are needed. Of course, to be politically correct, one must bang ‘thalis,’ do ‘bhangra’ dancing on terraces and light candles. I think that filling empty ‘thalis’ of slum-dwellers and enlightening illiterate Indian minds are better options.

Computers and technology might not be everyone’s forte; for instance, I am ‘technologically challenged’. But, there is a great option: networking and collaborating. Two of my deacon-students—Roshan Pinto, SJ and PS Prabin, RCJ—generously chipped in to make the homilies sound. One plus point about homebound online homilies that is not possible on regular Sundays: one can delete, snooze, snore or switch off. Be that as it may, let’s come up with creative ways to build church, nation and world.

—Matters India

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To hang or not to hang

– Humanly speaking...

At the very outset it may be said that those opposing the Death Penalty [DP] do yeoman service to those sentenced to death, not only in India but in countries where capital punishment continues to be the norm, by going to town with a demand for the abolishment of the same. There couldn't be a better way of expressing or demonstrating Christian love than in and through forgiveness. Add to it the love and concern so graciously shown to prisoners (rapists included, surely) by those exercising 'prison ministry' and we have a river of Christian mercy flowing in our midst! On behalf of all convicts presently on the death row, a huge THANK YOU to all those working ever so conscientiously to have the DP summarily dropped, be it in our country or wherever! May their tribe increase!



by Ladislaus L D'Souza

Having said that, I would like to ask those of my fellow Christian journalists who are ardent opponents of the DP just one question: What is the alternative you suggest as a **deterrent** to future offenders, **MOST SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO RAPISTS?** To arrive at a sensible answer to this question, I would suggest that those serious about justice take into consideration the following points:

- a. Of all offences that can ever be committed against a human being the most gruesome is **sexual violation**, generally termed as 'rape'. The victim of a murder suffers a horrible death; however, his/her life having been snuffed out, he/she suffers no more. But the victim of rape has to live the scars of the crude experience lifelong. Why? What is the victim's fault that she has to endure such suffering as long as she lives? In the circumstances, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to say that what a rape victim endures is a lifelong DP.
- b. Methinks, given the nature of the crime and its consequences for **the victim who very often is but of the angelic age of some 4 or 5 years**, the DP is too benign a punishment for a rapist. The Nirbhaya rapists lived over seven years after they had so gleefully enjoyed every moment of their dastardly act, further enjoying the drama played out by their lawyers who, with equal glee, tried every trick under the sun to both delay and stave off the hanging, with one lawyer brazenly declaring to the victim's moth-

er that there would be no hanging! When they were finally hanged, they died as well-fed bums, neither their physique nor their countenances betraying the slightest sign of remorse. It is all these factors that are going to be a great source of encouragement to future rapists irrespective of their individual age at the time of committing the offence.

- c. **Is LIFE IMPRISONMENT [LI] really a deterrent?** Chances are that a rapist whose DP has been commuted to LI could even be freed after a certain number of years on account of good conduct, while his victim languishes in some sort of a limbo as seen from the infamous Aruna Shanbhag rape case at the KEM Hospital in Parel, Mumbai.
- d. My suggestion as an alternative to any form of the DP is, **CASTRATION**, whether by a chemical process or a surgical one, the punishment perforce widely publicized. **The reason is not difficult to fathom: having to live with the loss of one's manhood for aye!** Can there be a surer deterrent? Ideally, after the hanging of the Nirbhaya convicts was shelved the first time, the parents of Nirbhaya should have filed a special petition in the Supreme Court no less, demanding **CASTRATION FOR THE FOUR CRIMINALS IN PLACE OF HANGING**. Of course, many would probably balk at this suggestion. Nevertheless, regardless of whether the demand would have been admitted or not, it would have set in motion a serious debate on the issue.
- e. Without going into what the hapless parents of Nirbhaya probably went through, it would be pertinent to ask oneself: On the one hand, what would I have wanted for the rapist/s if the victim were MY daughter, MY sister, MY wife, MY mother, MY niece, MY friend, or MY best friend's little girl, and on the other, send out a strong and clear message to all perverts or prospective rapists?
- f. If neither the DP nor **CASTRATION** for rapists, then what is the alternative as punishment that serves as a surefire deterrent?

Every human person worth his/her salt, is duty bound to think seriously over the issue and come up with viable alternatives, more so Christian writers and journalists who have it in their power to influence a correct conclusion. **Are we, both as Christians and as writers, journalists, editors and publishers, going to face up to our God-given responsibility, or are we going to pretend that while we oppose the DP in order to please**



"URBI ET ORBI" - Solemn Silence, Solidarity and Hope...

As I saw you walk the talk on the almost "lonely" aisle down and up the erected platform, against the blue azure of the night, I felt it was almost like the darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane that you were walking into. And as the firelights danced in the water strewn streets, there seemed to hang a suspense the world over, as we watched our television screens.

As you began to climb the steps, with help, leading up to the raised platform, and the light silhouetted you against the facade of Saint Peter's Basilica, my heart leaped in joy to see you frail and yet my "strong Roman Pontiff", leading his flock from the front. No wounded soldier are you, Your Holiness!

As the evening went on from moment to moment, and the lights dimmed to show the heavenly stars you rose as the "evening star" to begin the solemn service, which the world watched with bated breath. I could sense God's epiphany descending on "urbi et Orbi".. and its aura continued to dazzle.

Your gracious words, explaining and reflecting the Gospel account of "the fear stricken disciples", shone through with new depth and meaning (cf Mk 4:35). There was something in your calm composure and steady voice that spoke of hurt, hope, solidarity and compassion. Surely the Lord was with you that evening, in superabundant inspiration, as you held my

(Contd.. from p. 14)

God knows whom, it is jolly well someone else's responsibility to come up with alternatives, even as offenders meanwhile continue to go scot-free?

Finally, it is said to be mandatory for those formally entering the medical profession to take what is known as the 'Hippocratic Oath' that enjoins on every physician the duty to defend life by upholding ethics in the practice of the medical profession. How come there is no such provision for those formally entering the Law profession? Perhaps the very education and formation of lawyers needs to include the awareness of human sensitivity and the observance of ethics that enjoins on them the need for maintaining high standards in terms of ensuring justice for the right person. **Keeping in mind that justice delayed is justice denied, all lawyers/advocates must set limits to their efforts at keeping the guilty off the hook—or, off the noose if you wish!—so as to ensure deserving and speedy justice to the victim that serves as a viable deterrent to all future offenders, particularly rapists.**

attention to your words filled with unction.

The **miraculous Crucifix** usually hanging above the main Altar in the church of San Marcello on the city's Via del Corso, reigned supreme atop the platform and true to her "handmaideness" the 6th century Byzantine icon of Our Blessed Mother, **Salus Populi Romani** [the Protectress and Health of the Roman People], from the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, subdued yet surreal in the blue twilight, couldn't but stamp on our senses the aura of man's feeble art as it strives to express the grandeur of God and things of faith and belief. Your reverential homage of the two symbols of faith, was most humbling and indeed you gave fresh meaning to "the Servant of Servants" which you sign alongside your name as Supreme Pontiff.

And then the most sacred moment! The moment of the exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament on the Altar, within the atrium of Saint Peter's Basilica - oh, what glory, as if the Incarnation, the Epiphany, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection and the Ascension of our Lord, all rolled into one, caressed our universe! Emmanuel, God-with-us, was truly present there, exuding His mighty presence on all humankind, in solemn silence, solidarity and hope.

The deep silence interspersed with meaningful chanting and vocal prayers and litany - was music to the ear, soothing the heart and the soul! Oh, what glory offered to our King of kings and Lord of lords... Amen - Alleluia..!! And then the solemn Tantum Ergo - oh sweet Jesus, you deserve the best and your creatures gave you their best in splendid voices and on bended knee. I was there on mine, firmly to the ground, eyes fixed on the white of the Sacred Host within the dazzling monstrance—and I wept.

And then the piece de resistance, the Solemn Benediction! Your tired yet steady voice, your incensing of the Sacred Lord, your hands raised clasping the monstrance in blessing gave "Urbi et Orbi" a solemn sense of assurance, comfort, strength and solidarity. Yes, the hour melted into the darkness and stillness of the night, and as you walked away back into the atrium there to repose our Lord within the tabernacle, our world slept the sleep of babes, confident in the compassion and mercy of Our loving God and the promise of a glorious and triumphant Easter! Deo gratias, Papa Franciscus..!!

- Father Austin Norris

Love, What is it?

Sitting beside each other, staring at the night sky
They began to whisper in their minds
This doesn't seem right.
Something is missing he said
There is no love he declared.

What is love she wondered
Is it the initial spark and undying romance?
The cuddling and kisses
Yes, it was all missing
But, was it love anyways?

She looked into his eyes and began to wonder
What does it mean to be in love?
Is it the soft prayers she whispers asking God to keep
him safe, every time he is late?
Or is it the food she cooks keeping his taste in mind.
Why does she reach out to him first to share good
news and search for him in the crowd when she feels
lost?
Is it not love when she tries to look best for him and
cry when he ignores?
Is it just a simple feeling when she messages to check
on him despite his anger and resistance?
Why does her world go spinning when he coughs out
loud?
Or she chooses to give up all her plans, just to take
care of him when he down with simple fever.
If this is not love she began to wonder what was it?
Was it not love that made her protect their little baby
in her womb?
Was it not love that made her give up her so-called
expectations just to see him excel?

What is love she began to wonder
Was it a word or a just a feeling?
Would it remain or sway?

She could not stop the tears in her eyes
And rested her head on his shoulders and began to
cry.
Seeing her sob his heart skipped a beat
And realized this was it.



by Sonal Lobo

He could not see her hurt
He could not bear to see her sad.
If this was not love then what was it?

He could fight against the whole world
Just to keep her smile,
She was his only world
And her presence had made it all worthwhile.

He laughed at his foolishness and hugged her tight
He said this is love
When we are together.
Its love when we cook together and wash together.
Its love when we discuss our future together
It is love when we are raising our children
It is love when at times we are fighting.
Its love when we stand up for each other.

When days turn into years
Red roses may dry out
Chocolates may turn bitter.
Outings become boring
But love gets better.

Naughtiness of Infatuation
Craziness of attraction
Everything begins to fizzle

But true love begins to mature
The sacrament of matrimony
Keeps two heart in harmony
No matter what you feel
Love between a husband and wife only gets stron-
ger
And prevails forever.

Author & artiste of excellence - Richie Pais

— Ivan Saldanha-Shet.

A unique human set to remain in memory, not by the trophies in his name but by the people who remember him in ways incalculable. Richard John Pais, was 51 years old, he succumbed to the deadly disease of stomach cancer on March 1, 2020. A very positive life and all possible treatment at Fr.Muller's Mangalore was to no avail - the Lord called him in his prime in less than 3 months of illness. At the funeral mass which was specially accommodated at the Rosario Cathedral on the afternoon of March 2, an unprecedented crowd which was deeply touched that such a brilliant Konkani and English writer; an acclaimed director, dramatist and artiste who held the city's audiences captive on many an occasion was no more.



A true creative person he was, a master of many facets of creativity, a story spinner, theater person, film script writer, director, journalist, and most of all a loving human to be big and small with deep sincerity. Effort and enthusiasm for Konkani in particular, all his work bore his singular stamp of genuineness with precision the hall mark at every stage, this has been my personal observation very often.

He wrote essays, satirical on current affairs, he penned short stories and poems, which were published in the form of books, 'Kolaveri' (2012) 'Vidhushak' (2015) and 'Fathor' (2017). Even as he was ailing at the hospital, his much acclaimed short story collection 'Fathor' was selected for the T M A Pai award in January 2020, which he received on his hospital bed.

As a playwright, Richie offered two of his best dramas to the Konkani world, the biblical story, 'Tum Vortho Dhanya' (You are great, Lord) based on the story of Job Patriarch from the Old Testament and 'Paanch Mornam'



(Five funerals), which became trendsetters in Konkani theatre. The shows at the historical Don Bosco Hall in the city brought back old Konkani drama memories to many and several other venues to hosted his plays.

In addition, he also produced two short films, 'Terrific Sense', a silent short film of 3.58 minutes on YouTube, and 'Silence to Sound, a short film in black and white format on YouTube. The satirical and farcical silent movie based on mobile phone journey from 1940 to 2019 received tremendous positive reviews. The film has been chosen for many short film festivals around the world and will be premiered in Lift-Off Film Festival in New York, July 14, 2020. It is the irony of life that a creative artiste like Richie Pais had to leave the stage even at the pinnacle of his story.

Richie had joined well known media house of Mangalore - Daijiworld, in 2015 as a senior editor and was heading the editorial team since 2017. His education and youth was around the western ghats, his father served as manager in the estates. Soon after his return from Africa he lived for a while in Bandra Mumbai and managed a well known bakery, along with foray in to the world of literature and theater. In Mangalore he and the family were members of the Rosario Cathedral parish and lived there taking an active part with multi faceted contributions. His children went to the catholic Schools here, his wife was a loving home maker who could be seen always occupied with her family welfare.

The end was indeed sad, the world around him joined in prayer and solidarity with his dear mother Bennybai, his only sister Renita who were by his bedside all the days of his sickness and devoted wife Femina, children Dillon and Nia, whose love and support was close to him always, many will remember this special personality - Richie John Pais.



A woman goes to the doctor for her yearly physical. The nurse starts with certain basic items. "How much do you weigh?" she asks. "115" she says. The nurse puts her on the scale. It turns out her weight is 140. The nurse asks, "Your height?" "5 foot 8," she says. The nurse checks and sees that she only measures 5'5". She then takes her blood pressure and tells the woman it is very high. "Of course it's high!" she screams, "When I came in here I was tall and slender! Now I'm short and fat!"

A Doberman, a Golden Retriever and a cat died and met God. God said to them, "Tell me why I should let you into heaven." The Doberman said, "I'll protect you with my life." God said, "You can sit at my right side." The Golden Retriever said, "I will fetch your slippers and anything else you ask me to." God said, "Then you can sit at my left side." Finally, God looked at the cat and said, "And what will you do?" The cat said, "Excuse me. I think you're sitting in my seat."

Made in India

A Japanese tourist hailed a taxi in downtown Delhi and asked to be taken to the Indira Gandhi airport. On the way, a car zoomed by and the tourist responded, 'Oh! Toyota - Made in Japan! Very fast!' Not too long afterward, another car flew by the taxi. 'Oh! Nissan - Made in Japan! Very fast!' The taxi driver, who was 100% Indian, was starting to get a little annoyed that the Japanese made cars were passing his taxi, when yet another car passed the taxi as they were turning into the airport, 'Oh! Honda - Made in Japan! Very fast!' The taxi driver stopped the car, pointed to the meter, and said, "That'll be Rupees 500." 'Rupees 500? It was short ride! Why so much?' The Taxi driver smiled as he replied, 'Meter - Made in India. Very fast.'

Roger, who was 19 years old, was buying an expensive bracelet, to surprise his girlfriend on Valentine's Day,



at a very smart jeweller's shop. The jeweller inquired, 'Would you like your girlfriend's name engraved on it' Roger thought for a moment, grinned, then answered, 'No, instead engrave "To my one and only love". 'Yes, sir, how very romantic of you.' Roger retorted with a glint in his eye, 'Not exactly romantic, but very practical. This way, if we break up, I can use it again.'

Patient : Oh doctor, I'm starting to forget things.

Doctor : Since when have you had this condition?

Patient : What condition?

Wife calls her mother:

Today I fought so much with my husband. I am coming to live with you again.

Mother : No, He should pay for his mistake. I am coming to live with you.

Wife : I wish I was a newspaper, so I would be in your hands all-day.

Husband : I too wish, that you were a newspapers, So I could have a new one everyday.

A the thoughtful gift

Guy : I got my girlfriend a "Get better soon" card.

Friend : Why? Is she ill?

Guy : No. She's not ill or anything but she could definitely get better.

A man's feeling.

It feels like mini heart attack, when I don't find my mobile in my pocket. However, it's almost like heart fail, when I see it in my girlfriend's hand

instead.

Wife : Do you want dinner?

Husband : Sure, what are my choices?

Wife : Yes and no.

Venkat : Is Google a he or a she?

Johnny : A she, no doubt because it won't let you finish your sentence without suggesting other ideas.

Dad : Andy has 150 candy bars. He eats 125. What does Andy have now?

Son : Andy has diabetes now.

Teacher : I killed a person convert the sentence into future tense.

Student : The future tense is 'You will go to jail'.

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JACK OF ALL STALL

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Tel.: 23725963, 23749358

Estd: 1951 Prop. B. D'Souza

Water Interesting Facts

Thy name is life and water is part and parcel of our life. Three fourths of earth's surface is covered by water and only one fourth is land mass as per geographical survey. Most people know it and it is time to keep an eye on water position available at our disposal. What many of us do not know is that 97.5% of the water available in earth is salt water and unworthy of drinking and bathing. Only 2.5% of earth's water is sweet water of which roughly 68% is held as ice in Arctic and Antarctic region. Of remaining 32% of 2.5% most quantities are stored in underground and in various kinds of organic and inorganic matters. It is only a mini minuscule part, precisely 0.26% of entire water of the world which is in all the rivers, lakes, ponds and other water bodies which are the only sources of sweet surface water available to living beings and the need to preserve and protect is of our utmost importance. So preserving water and not polluting it is of paramount importance and each and everyone of us in a thickly populated country like India should realise this and control usage water to the optimum level.

In a reality check we observe on the World Water Day that the source of groundwater is drying up in this country and the alarming worry about water levels continue. Many of the proposed smart cities in India lacks basic infrastructure and the decision to include them is defeated with the drawbacks particularly lack of drinking water and usable water. Thus we are in troubled water and India's largest state UP tops the list. Wells and bore wells serve the purpose when there is water shortage.

As water levels go down considerably we should plan for Rain Water Harvesting as in Tamil Nadu and other neighbouring states. All through our childhood and growing up years, when ever we had an opportunity to play in water or leave the tap open with water flowing down the drains, as elders always used to reprimand us for stating that with every drop of water, wasted it was money that was getting wasted.

Never we did realise the consequences or the connection between water and money, but now with the sorts of situation that we are heading towards and placed on the brink of a catastrophe and buying water with ground water drying up, remember the golden words. It is time for retrospection at this crucial juncture as the water shortage threat throughout the world is catching up thick and fast.

We believe, in India we have not taken the issue of wa-

ter on top priority. Still there is no proper and concrete guidelines to restrict the malpractices of misutilisation of water. There is no segregation of water in India. Drinking water is used for washing clothes, gardening, cleaning cars, roads and the most important usage in huge and bulk by the housing sector. No policy for industrial water and the wastage continued in every field without anybody bothering about water.

There is no policy of restricting the usage of drinking water for multi purpose requirements. It is a matter of great regret that we pay water tax and impurified water is supplied at doorstep which is then purified by various process to obtain drinkable water. Despite the fact that water is supplied by Government Agencies, we talk big and hardly believe in doing minimum. Adjust your daily habits to save litres of clean fresh water every day.

While brushing your teeth, use a glass of water instead of a running tap for wetting the brush and rinsing. A running tap can waste about 16 litres of water each minute. When taking bath shower instead of a bath and limit your showers to a maximum of four minutes. For shaving use a cup, sink or container of warm water to clean the shaver in rather than a warm running tap. Never shave in the shower. Clearing dishes after the meal require more water and so scrape and compost your food waste instead of rinsing it off plates and dishes. At the time of washing dishes. rinse dishes in a bucket and use the water on the garden after wards. In dishwasher do not rinse dishes before putting them in the dishwasher.

Ensure you only do full loads of washing, if possible using cold water and adjusting water levels to suit the size of loads. Instead of waiting for the warm water to arrive try and capture the water that flows out of the shower or tap prior to it being the right temperature and put it on the garden. Fix dripping taps and toilets quickly. They can waste up to 13 litres of water a day.

Fresh water is the life blood of nature. Without it, we would not have clean air, food, drink and many aesthetic and recreational benefits. Therefore, we need to ensure we use water in a sustainable way – we need to share it with all life on the planet and respect and value this 'life blood'. The consequences of doing otherwise can be seen in the spreading deserts across the world and the resulting drought and famine that can soon follow.

—Jayanthi Subramaniam

Goa People's Voices COVID19 Response

Sub: Redress issues of life and livelihoods of fish workers and food security through supply of fish during lockdown

To, The Chief Minister of Goa, Minister for Fisheries,
The Chief Secretary and other Govt. departments, Goa

We write out of a serious concern for fishers, fish workers and consumers of fish in the face of directives issued by the Department of Fisheries, Government of Goa.

There has been on the one hand, a directive not to go fishing to even the traditional fishers during lockdown and on the other hand a directive for fishworkers on mechanized boats to remain on the boats and to be anchored off the shore till the end of this lockdown. And there is on the other hand the fact that fish is a source of nutritional status of a large number of people in Goa and we can get it fresh as against canned food which even the WHO Guidelines are vetoing.

Not only do the Government of India guidelines dated 24th March not speak of ban on fishing or sale of fish, but in fact specially include fish in the list of commodities to be exempted from the lockdown. Yet, those on fishing vessels who cannot inherently maintain social distancing by the very nature of the particular fishing are left vulnerable offshore, and those who can maintain social distancing through traditional fishing have been deprived of the possibilities of fishing and being enabled to earn their livelihoods and also to provide fish to the consumers. The consumers have the fish supply arbitrarily cut off.

In Goa, in both marine and inland sectors, there has been either forcible shutdown of fisheries activities or breakdown of the associated value chain. Around the coast many fishers who have come back from fishing in the sea with their catch cannot deliver it as auction markets are closed and there are no buyers. The fish is left to rot in the boats or dumped in the sea.

Mismanagement and bad planning has meant the fish landing sites were ill equipped to handle vessels returning with fish. But people have been able to return. Many of the men on the vessels do not have homes in Goa. They will need to be able to come on shore and be provided with shelter. As we see it, there at least 1200 canoes and on those canoes that have purseining nets, there are 8-10 persons; and further that there are at least 700 to 800 trawlers on which there are 30-40 persons employed. They have not been contacted by any Government with support. This directive to stay offshore, therefore, is endangering vulnerable lives and putting them at a greater risk right now.

There has also been police repression of the fishing communities including threats of violence, cancellation of license, and imposition of fines for fishing, besides violence

on people who are selling fish or transporting in order to sell fish from landing sites to the market. This police repression must be stopped immediately.

We therefore demand

a) the State enable these persons stranded on the vessels to come to the shore, and provide them access to a secure stay for the remainder of the lockdown period, instead of letting them be at the mercy of nature and boat owners; that fishing vessel owners pay them their dues, like other employers directed to do so.

b) that an economic package be provided specifically to fishing community keeping in mind that the arriving monsoon ban season and the impact on the livelihoods of thousands of fishworkers and ones who are dependent on the occupation, including release of pending petrol subsidy and other subsidies of the year 2017-2018.

c) that all essential commodities be provided to fisher societies so that it can be distributed to the workers/crew members.

d) that all fishing jetties and landing sites be sanitized on regular basis.

e) that awareness campaigns (COVID-19) be built in community hubs in collaboration with local fish worker organizations.

f) that only non-mechanised forms of fishing like ramponn, mag, catai and pagel form of fishing be allowed, as these forms of fishing will help to adhere to social distancing norms and will also cater to the requirement of fish, which is a staple food and source of nutrition of many a person in Goa.

g) that police repression of fishers and fish transporters and fish vendors be stopped forthwith and confidence building measures be initiated to enable small scale fishers to fish, fish transporters to transport and fish vendors to sell fish catch without fear of police or any security agencies.

h) that consequently, the Notices Nos. DF/OFFS/SOCI.INFO/2019-20/ dated 24th March 2020, Notice No. DF/OFFS/SOCI.INFO/2019-20/6112 dated 29th March, 2020, be revoked and required advisories be issued to fish workers in the entire supply chain, together with enabling assistance and demonstration of use of masks and soap water as well as continuous health check-ups, monitoring and follow-ups.

Olencio Simoes General Secretary, Goenchea Ramponkarancho Ekvott and over 100 Goan organisations and Goans

VKWA Serves Food for Poor and Needy in Vasai

Helping and UpLifting the distressed & spreading smiles & Hope in their Lives during lockdown period in Vasai Area.

On 3rd April 2020 VKWA (Vasai Konkani Welfare Association) managing committee with the Almighty God's Blessings served Dal Chawal to 2350 people for lunch & served Khichdi to 2750 for Dinner at Vasai west & east, Ramabai nagar, anand nagar, Koliwada, Hattim mohalla, Vasai gaon (Food was prepared at vishwakarma hall)

This was possible through generous donors and volunteers who came forward willingly to serve. The Association is grateful to all of them. VKWA will organise more such meals to the needy and poor in the coming days.

Photographs speak more than words



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7031. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in September 1985), Ht. 5' 7", Wt. 60 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Undergraduate, IT Software, works at TCS. Contact email : josephavild@yahoo.co.in

6948. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic bachelor, (Born in July 1987), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 70 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Sc., working a HR. Contact email : adleyds@gmail.com

7025. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in May 1992), Ht. 5' 8", Wt. 56 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.E. (IT), working as a Software Developer. Contact email : kevin92ster@gmail.com

6949. MUMBAI : Proposals are invited from parents of a Roman Catholic God fearing educated homely girl for a Mangalorean Roman Catholic boy, finance professional, (Born in March 1983), Ht. 5' 10", Church marriage annulled, no issues presently working overseas on PR. Please email the profile and photo to

7034. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in June 1988), Ht. 5' 11", Wt. 80 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. M.C.A., Software Engineer, working as an Software Engineer, Asst. Manager (IT), Only Sonm seeks alliance from Mangalorean RC Spinster, educated, working in Mumbai. Reply with full details & photograph to email : ID : vivian1548@gmail.com
Mobile : 9096141335

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jeny22_m@yahoo.co.in

6966. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in September 1965), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 45 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. SSC., working as a Field Executive. Contact email :

sameer_bhagwatt777@rediffmail.com

6968. DUBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in March 1991), Ht. 5' 11", Wt. 70 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Graduate in Commerce. Working in Dubai since 2014 in Indian Consalate Office. Designation Senior Customer Executive. Contact Email : shalenedsouza4@gmail.com

6963. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in July 1981), Ht. 5' 2", Wt. 62 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. MBA, Well settled. Contact email : freshflwr@gmail.com

6941. MANGALORE : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Divorcee, (Born in November 1985), Ht. 5' 11", Wt. 80 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.E., working as IT/Software Developer. Contact email :

rickson.philip@gmail.com

6930. GOA : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in August 1979), Ht. 5' 7", Wt. 65 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. SCC and Diploma in Electrical, Electrical Contractor. Contact email : cajetan1208@gmail.com

6917. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in

October 1985), Ht. 5' 7", Wt. 65 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.E. MBA, working as an Engineer.

Contact email :

delphinempinto@gmail.com

6898. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in September 1988), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 68 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Post Graduate in Hotel Management, working as a Supervisor -Food and Beverage in Royal Caribbean Cruise USA. Contact

email : rohanfernandes61@yahoo OR Mob.: 8459353089 / 7407814175

6895. HONAVAR : Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in August 1981), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 65 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. 5th Std., having own property business. Contact email : rosiehorta77@gmail.com

Mob: 7977361995

6891. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in June 1989), Ht. 5' 9", Wt. 70 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Com., well settled. Contact email :

starwin89@gmail.com

6888. AMRITSAR : Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in March 1990), Ht. 5' 10", Wt. 77 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Hotel Management (Diploma) in Singapore, working as a Captain. Contact email : shephalivancet0@gmail.com

6862. MUMBAI : Goan RC Bachelor, (Born in February 1983), Ht. 5' 11", Wt. 72 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Com., well settled working in Mumbai. Contact email :

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7081. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in April 1993), 5' 3", Wt. 55 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Masters of Dentistry (MDS), Dental Surgeon, Doctor by profession. Contact email : carlferns93@gmail.com

7074. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in January 1985), 5' 2", Wt. 65 kgs, (Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.D.S.,(Mumbai), Self Practising. Seeks a well settled qualified Or Professional bachelor. Contact : email : dabfern@yahoo.co.in

7069. MUMBAI : Tamilian Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in April 1992), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 50 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Sc., Nursing, Staff Nurse. Contact email : mpchandran68@gmail.com

Mobile : 9820041633

7072. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in April 1991), Ht. 4' 10", Wt. 60 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. Digital Media, working for Designing Firm. Contact email : aubreyds@gmail.com

7064. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in May 1988),

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7066. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in June 1987), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 78 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.E., (EXTC) M.S. (International Business Management), working as a Consulting Manager. Contact email : l2018anselm@yahoo.com

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Ht. 5' 2", Wt. 50 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. MBA, working for Private Company as an Accounts Executive. Contact email : cecrc19@gmail.com

7071. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in April 1983), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 63 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn.M.A. B.Ed., Teacher in Aided School. Contact email : marinamia44@gmail.com

7106. AHMEDNAGAR : Goan Roman Catholic Divorcee, (Born in January 1986), Ht. 5' 3", Fair Complexion, Edn. High School, Contact email : anthonyfernandes9850

7070. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in March 1992), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 48 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. M.Com., CS., working as a Company Secretary in Private Firm. Contact email : smile9920@outlook.com

7060. MUMBAI : East Indian Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in February 1983), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 50 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., Diploma in Finance from NMIMS, Diploma in B, Self employed. Contact email : vianneyde2k@yahoo.com

7067. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in October 1994), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 54 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. Chartered Accountant,

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tant, working for Finance Department in MNC. Contact email : wpm999@gmail.com

7058. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in September 1987), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 55 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working back office. Contact email : venita_fernandes@rediffmail.com

7065. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in December 1989), Ht. 5' 6", Wt.69 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. M.Sc., & Dip. in Clinical Research, working as Business Process Lead in TCS. Contact email : mendonca_luke@yahoo.co.in

7057. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in December 1993), Ht. 5' 1", Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Masters, working as a Design Thinker. Contact email : louelladsouza10@gmail.com

7054. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in June 1986), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 80 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Masters in Finance and working in Mumbai. Contact email : clamapinto@gmail.com

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Hang Religion, Spirituality Is The Big Bang!

(Concluding part of the trilogy “Is Religion Dead?” and “Was Jesus Religious?”)

My previous two articles were in response to questions being raised about religion in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. They have elicited varying responses. One school of thought still clings to the belief that Religion is now dead and we have ushered in a new dawn of closed churches and openness to Spirituality. Perhaps I still have something to contribute to this debate.

I would begin by defining what I understand by Religion, Religiosity and Spirituality. By Religion I mean an organised set of beliefs, practices and structure. By Religiosity I mean the merely external, and possibly superficial, following of certain religious practices, without fully comprehending their deeper import. By Spirituality I mean various expressions or attempts that are not bound by religious precepts or structures, though they may find inspiration from them. I must here iterate two things. Firstly, these are my own deft or daft definitions. Secondly, I do not believe that I have the right to judge anybody else's thoughts and actions, though I reserve the right to analyse or question them.

In my previous two pieces, I have focussed on Religion. I will now turn to Spirituality. I have a great sense of inadequacy as I write, because there are really no yardsticks to describe or measure Spirituality. It could mean many things to many people. Hence I will limit my thoughts to my own experiences, and what I find in the person of Jesus himself.

I need to delve deep into my past, because today I am living what could be described as a “secular” life, far from the world of “spirituality”. I am contradicting myself when I simultaneously aver that living a secular life does not make one less spiritual. Only the expression or manifestation varies. My personal mantra now is “First seek the kingdom of God and its righteous and everything else will be added unto you” (Mat 36:33).

I have earlier said that Jesus was a religious person. I am now asserting that he was a deeply spiritual person. He was spiritual because he was constantly led by the Holy Spirit to do the will of his Father. So my definition of a spiritual person is one who, like Jesus, seeks to do the will of God in all things. For this the seeker should have the necessary tools of discerning God's will, and the strength to do so. Ironically, the inspiration for both may come from religion. In the case of a Christian, I would see this inspiration coming primarily from the life and words

of Jesus as found in sacred scripture. Its implementation would depend on how it affects what Jesus called the least of the brethren (cf Mat 25:31-46), or Gandhiji's last man and VinobhaBhave'sAntyodaya.

Since there are no parameters to assess the spiritual journey, the Christian tradition has held that we need a mentor, a guide, a guru. It is so easy to go off on a tangent and end up in the wilderness. Going back to our geometry class, we know that a tangent moves away from a circle. At the point of departure, the difference will be imperceptible, but with the passage of time, the distance will grow, as with a spacecraft leaving its elliptical orbit. It then gets lost in outer space. I find that there is often a very fine dividing line between truth and error. It is not easy to discern. Spiritual discernment is

something that I learnt from the Jesuits, or more specifically the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits.

As a lay man, I had made many solitary retreats during the 7 years that I lived in Jyotinetan Ashram, Bareilly (1975-1982) with Fr. Augustine Deenabandhu OFM Cap as my spiritual mentor. During those years I experienced “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (cf Rom 8:21). My defining moments were the two Ignatian Retreats that I made; the full 30 day one under Fr. Dan Rice SJ in Punarjanamsthan, Bihar, and a 20 day one under Fr. Josef Neuner SJ in De Nobili College, Pune. Both these retreats helped me to discern the will of God in my life. I also had the venerable life of Fr. Deenabandhu before me, to guide me. After I got married in 1984, I had a new mentor, my wife Meera. Some may consider this ridiculous, but it is true. For example, in 1990 when George Menezes, the erstwhile National President of the All India Catholic Union asked me to be his successor in office. I expressly said to him, “First get my wife's permission”.

Spirituality is like unchartered waters. Hence we must have a mentor, even if at times it may seem like a tormentor to one's soul. Even the Pope has to have a mentor in the form of a Confessor. Though Pope Francis himself is a Jesuit, he has a Capuchin like Fr. Deenabandhu as his Confessor. It is here that I defer from what is often described as Indian Spirituality. Based on the ashram model of Guru-Shishya, the Guru becomes a know-all. It is for this reason Jesus forewarned us that nobody should be called Master or seek the high places (cf Mat 23:8-12). Omniscient and Omnipotent gurus could be



by chhotebhai *



(Contd.. from p. 22)

potentially dangerous.

For Jesus himself, Joseph the carpenter, and Mary who pondered many things in her heart (cf Lk 2:19) would have been his mentors (cf Lk 2:51). Yet he required confirmation or affirmation of what he was to embark upon. He therefore had many manifestations (epiphanies) in his life. His first epiphany was at the age of 12, when he began to comprehend who his Father was (cf Lk 2:49). His second epiphany was his baptism by John (cf Lk 3:21-22) immediately followed by his excruciating desert experience (cf Lk 4:1-13). The next epiphany is the Transfiguration, again affirming that he was indeed the Son (cf Mat 17:2). His final 2 epiphanies are seldom described as such. His penultimate was the raising of Lazarus shortly before his own death and resurrection (cf Jn 11:38). He needed that reassurance that his death would not be in vain. His ultimate epiphany is the internal conflict in Gethsemane where he pleads with the Father to allow this cup to pass over him (cf Mat 26:39). Yet after prayer he was able to say "Your will be done" (cf Mat 26:40) and later to say "It is accomplished. Into your hands I commend my spirit" (cf Jn 19:30, Lk 23:46).

Now all this sounds very well in the case of Jesus. How about weak mortals like us? How can we discern the will of God and then accomplish it? There are no easy answers. As I said, Spirituality is like uncharted waters, a Cloud of Unknowing, based on the Uncertainty Principle. It is for this reason that the vast majority of believers prefer not to take any risk, and simply follow the rules. So if I go to church on Sundays, attend some novenas or say the Rosary, and do some acts of charity, I feel that I am a good person. I have followed the rulebook.

But for a spiritual seeker, who wishes to be a disciple of Jesus, this is not good enough. I see three encounters with Jesus where good people are told that what they are doing is not good enough. The first is of the rich young man who had kept all the commandments (cf Mat 19:16-22). The second was to Martha who was doing a good job and yet was asked to take another step (cf Lk 10:42). And the third was Nicodemous who was asked to be born again (cf Jn 3:3).

The spiritual life is like walking a tight rope, a delicate balancing act. One has to be always alert to the gentle tugs and pushes that come one's way. We call them promptings of the Holy Spirit. I will here share two insights from my Ignatian Retreat. Firstly, for the one who is ill prepared the coming of the Holy Spirit is like rain splattering loudly on a tin roof. This is what happened at the first Pentecost (cf Acts 2:2). For the soul that is disposed to his coming it is like a drop of water on a sponge, hardly noticeable on the surface and quickly absorbed. We see this with Mary at the Annunciation (cf Lk

1:38). It was no earth-shattering event!

The second lesson is that we are aware of our weaknesses and so guard against them. In the process we leave our strengths unguarded allowing the tempter to enter in; just like the havoc wreaked by Covid-19 today. It caught the strong, independent, wise world and its leaders completely off guard.

I am aware that much of what I have now written may be befuddling. I will be neither surprised nor disappointed. But I do believe that there are many out there who are restless spiritual seekers in their own ways. This piece is addressed to them, in the hope that it will help them in some way in their spiritual quest.

Before writing this piece, I harkened back to another spiritual master, St. Theresa of Avilla of the 16th century, and her spiritual classic "Interior Castle". I immediately went to the Seventh Mansion that records her spiritual marriage or ultimate state of spiritual ecstasy. There are two important takeaways from this pinnacle of spirituality. She repeatedly talks of humility and the need for spiritual experiences to be translated into action. She debunks the popular concept that Mary chose the better part over her sister Martha.

I would conclude with another important tip for those embarking on a Spiritual odyssey. Have the good news of the Gospel in one hand and the newspaper in the other, so as to contextualise your spirituality. This is in fact the thrust of the Vatican II document "Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World" (Gaudium et Spes). This in turn draws inspiration from the "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church" (Lumen Gentium) that is in fact a paradigm shift from religiosity to spirituality.

The tragedy, as I will not tire of saying, is that the wished-for renewal of the Church according to the vision of Vatican II has been stifled by the "good people"; the hierarchy and the clergy that wallow in a status quoist comfort zone. It is these "good" people who are unable to take that extra step Jesus invites us to do, so as to be perfect as the Father is (cf Mat 5:48). Several years ago I read an editorial in the Jesuit theological magazine "Vidya Jyoti". It unequivocally stated that the vision of Vatican II could only be realised through an enlightened laity.

So let us embark on the path of spiritual enlightenment and lead this world from darkness to light, midst the encircling gloom of Covid-19. Let us be beacons of hope to those who are most in need (not with a symbolic candle in hand). Let that be the real Spiritual Big Bang as we enter Holy Week.

**The writer believes in the secular spirituality of the world we live in.*

PITY THE NATION OF IDIOTS!!!

*Fr. Cedric Prakash SJ

The famed political cartoonist Manjul has a very powerful cartoon in his *Mumbai Meri Jaan*, series in today's 'Mid-Day'. There are two frames. In the first frame there is the idiot box (TV) blaring "Friends! I'm here to ask for something!" There are four respondents: one apparently the hoi-polloi (the daily wage earner, the migrant, the unemployed???) who says "ask for me life"; the second, obviously a 'bhakt' replies with an unthinking "sure"; the third, with his hands folded, all dressed up but with a cricket bat under his arm (a celebrity??) says "please do"; and the fourth without doubt belonging to the corporate sector saying, "why not". Moving on to the second frame the idiot box booms "Stop applying your brains till further orders" and pat comes the four responses "never had it"; "of course"; "already did!" and "masterstroke". In typical brilliance, Manjul's cartoon says it all! It sums up the state of the nation today, in the wake of the terrible pandemic COVID-19!

The pandemic has already taken the lives of thousands all over the globe, with many more times that number who are affected. In India, there are already four thousand three hundred positive cases and the death toll (as of today) touching 111. Medical experts expect that over the next few days the cases and the deaths, in India will be exponential. The first case in the country, of this corona virus was reported as early 30 January. There were global alarms and fears that this virus would reach pandemic proportions even as it kept galloping through nation after nation. However, the Government of India and their cronies, continued to be absorbed in its own agenda: spewing hate speeches, engineering riots, toppling Governments, organizing jamborees and the like. They showed an absolutely callous approach in responding to this terrible calamity with needed sense of urgency and professionalism

Finally, only around the middle of March, the Government 'woke' up: first calling for a voluntary curfew on 22 March which ended in many road shows in several parts of the country. Then, on the 24 March, with just about a four hours' notice, the Prime Minister announced a 'lockdown' of the whole country of 1.3 billion people for a twenty-one-day period, which is scheduled to end on 14 April. The abrupt announcement of the 'lockdown' has had a severe impact on millions of the poor and marginalized sections of society and particularly on the daily-wage earners, the migrants and the unemployed. The sudden suspension of all public transportation, particularly the trains and buses meant that large groups of them had to walk hundreds of miles to return to their native places. Many of them even died on the way. In some places they were stopped by the 'authorities' and remanded to detention centres and at least in one place, 'disinfectant' was sprayed on them.

The sad and cruel fact remains that India, as of today, does not have the wherewithal to counter this pandemic. The WHO prescribed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the N95 masks so essential for doctors, nurses and other caregivers are virtually non-existent; there is a criminal shortage of ventilators, sanitizers, testing centres/ kits, hospital beds, isolation wards, intensive care units and other necessary medical equipment, if this pandemic accelerates in the next few days and weeks. Strangely enough India was exporting, till a 24 March ban, some of these essentials. Government officials have still not held a Media Conference on the pandemic till today!

On the 'voluntary curfew day' (22 March) the PM had sug-

gested that the people end the curfew with clapping etc. Once again for 5 April he suggested that candles and diyas and flashlights are lit, whilst all other lights are switched off. Both the 'dramas' were obviously 'populist acts' and given the frenzy in certain areas, would have certainly earned him some 'brownie points', sadly these are not the gimmicks which are expected from the leader of a nation in this time of crisis. On both days, there were huge crowds everywhere, serenading as though they were victory processions; on the first day, it was beating steel plates and drums, whistling and shouting; on the second day, besides the lights, there was a huge display of fireworks everywhere; almost a Diwali celebration. A BJP leader in Uttar Pradesh, Manju Tiwari, decided to be different. In a video that has been widely shared, the BJP leader is seen firing a shot in the air to the sound of cheering. In a place in Rajasthan, a house caught fire because of the carelessness of others. The responses by and large could be categorized as acts of idiosyncrasy, sycophancy and ludicrousness! Of a behavior highly irresponsible in these serious times.

The irony of these acts were that whilst there was seemingly all-round adulation (thanks to the 'godfied' media we have in the country today) the stark reality remains that millions of our fellow country women and men have to eke out a survival; given the situation today, they really don't know from where their next meal will come. The 'celebrations' (without social distancing), the loud clapping, the fireworks were certainly not sensitive acts to the plight of a sizeable section who are suffering. One cannot deny the fact that this is the way that fascism works, this is how it spreads its devious tentacles. Fortunately, there are still a fairly large group of thinking citizens in the country: who among other engagements, write, sketch, compose, sing and are also active on social media. There are several who are unable to accept the nonsense that has gripped the nation.

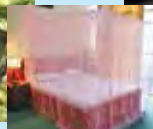
More than twelve years ago, the well-known American poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti wrote an incisive poem (based on a similar work written earlier by the Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran) 'Pity the Nation'. It is so apt for us in India today! The poem runs thus:

*"Pity the nation whose people are sheep
And whose shepherds mislead them
Pity the nation whose leaders are liars
Whose sages are silenced
And whose bigots haunt the airwaves
Pity the nation that raises not its voice
Except to praise conquerers
And acclaim the bully as hero
And aims to rule the world
With force and by torture
Pity the nation that knows
No other language but its own
And no other culture but its own
Pity the nation whose breath is money
And sleeps the sleep of the too well fed
Pity the nation oh pity the people
Who allow their rights to erode
and their freedoms to be washed away
my country, tears of thee
Sweet land of liberty"*

Voltaire, the French philosopher puts it succinctly, "it is difficult to free fools from the chains they revere"; but Manjul's cartoon says it all! Yes! Pity the Nation of Idiots!

*(Fr Cedric Prakash SJ is a human rights and peace activist/writer. Contact: cedricprakash@gmail.com)

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