

## WONDERING IN THE DESERT

The first patients I lost to COVID-19 were long-term cancer survivors. One was 91 years old who survived an aggressive lymphoma 11 years ago, an 89 year old who went into complete remission from multiple myeloma several years ago, and an 82 year old who survived lung cancer 9 years ago with chemotherapy and radiation therapy. I've lost several more after that. But the memory of the first three I cherish the most as we knew each other for many, many years, and we fought some memorable battles together and won. Early on, we did not know much about the pathophysiology of the COVID-19 disease and were in the dark initially on how to manage this devastating disease. We prayed to Almighty God to protect our elderly. Why was the virus sparing the very young?

When I saw my ophthalmologist, she had just come back to work after being sick for 6 weeks from COVID-19. Her husband and 2 children were also affected, but survived. When she took a look at her scheduled appointments, she saw many of the patients that were listed were already dead from the virus. Her patients were mostly elderly. Why was the virus so devastating to the old?

When COVID-19 patients were discharged to nursing homes rather than to their respective homes, it turned out to be a regrettable decision. Releasing COVID-19 survivors to nursing homes with their vulnerable residents with frail hearts, lungs and kidneys decimated the ranks of the nursing home population. Is God punishing these wayward generations?

These were the people who grew up in the 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's. Those decades were momentous in our history. It was marked by the worst world war ever in the 1940's, with over 40 million people losing their lives. It was the darkest age in terms of the brutality man inflicted on his fellow human beings. Coming out of that war, a war of ideologies followed, communism versus capitalism, Christianity versus secularism. Both sides committed atrocities and millions again died especially in the social experiments of China, Cambodia and elsewhere. There were wars of liberation in undeveloped countries, especially in South America. In the presence of intense suffering and affliction, should not more people have turned to God? When peace came to the world, people forgot about God, and sin came back with a vengeance.

We had the second Vatican Council in the 60's which was well-intentioned to bring the Church to the modern era. But the enemies of the Church from within misinterpreted its teachings which caused a multitude of priests and nuns to leave consecrated life. St. Pope Paul VI said that time: "the smoke of Satan has entered the Church." Then came the Vietnam war, drugs and the sexual revolution, the plague of pornography, widespread contraception and abortion, sexual abuse of minors and children in the Church and the whole world, forced prostitution, the depiction of homosexuality in movies and TV, same-sex marriage, the loss of Fear of the Lord, the rise of devil-worshippers, the popularity of TV shows like Lucifer, the removal of God from our government and our schools, the replacement of religion from our schools with sex education, the loss of sense of what is right and wrong. Everybody seems now to be doing what is right in their own eyes. In our Churches, there is loss of what is sacred. Church attendance has dropped to an all-time low. What happened to the greatest generation, the Baby Boomer generation, and subsequent generations?

What is happening now reminds me of Moses and the Israelites as they wandered in the desert for 40 years after the Exodus. God was displeased with what Moses and the other leaders did, and God punished them by preventing them from entering the Promised Land. For 40 years they lived in the desert, wandering from one spot to the next until all the people who were born in Egypt died, including Moses. Only 2 old men were allowed to enter the land of Canaan, Caleb and Joshua, because they trusted God and were willing to obey Him. Were these echoes of what was to come in the future?

God is all-patient and all-loving. He is slow to anger and easily forgives and forgets our sins, if we are truly sincere in our contrition and resolve to change for the better. God brings misfortune to our lives sometimes to remind us of Him, that He is there to help us, that He loves us always, unconditionally, like a true Father willing to wait for us for many, many years. Like the plagues in Egypt, He chastises us a little bit at a time, seemingly increasing in severity each time, to remind us of what is best for us. Is there anything worse than this present pandemic that is in store for the world? Or is it that what is best is yet to come? God reminds us that true happiness comes from Him alone, if we trust and obey Him, with the help of the saints and the Blessed Mother to show us how by their lives of holiness. Remember God created us to be with Him someday. Amen.