

## TIME TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: REMAINING CONNECTED IN CHRIST

In my final column for 2019, I wrote glowingly of “marking time” as we entered into *Anno Domini* 2020. Thinking back to the early 1970’s I recalled “wondering what life would **really be like in 2020** when I would be in my—yikes—mid-50’s!” Well, so far, it has been quite a **disappointing year** in many respects, and yet I for one am **not ready** to give it up for this year— not quite yet. What lies ahead on the horizon? July is but a memory as we enter into the dog days of summer. Time is **discombobulated**: we recently baptized our RCIA-elect; this past Thursday at the Chrism Mass, the Archbishop blessed the sacred oils that **should have** been used at Easter; a Catholic High School is holding its 2020 Commencement ceremony here today, *sans* parents (due to Covid-19 capacity limits)— just the students and a handful of administrators. Something is amiss— time has both stood still and been **turned upside down**. What on earth is going on?

*“Time present and time past/Are both perhaps present in time future,/And time future contained in time past./All time is eternally present/All time is unredeemable.”* With these words, **T. S. Eliot** (1888-1965) began his famous **Four Quartets** poem. Time as unredeemable? For the brilliant poet, what “might have been” is but an abstraction— it is useless because it did not come to pass. We only know what has **actually** come to pass. He continues: *“What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present./Footfalls echo in the memory/Down the passage which we did not take.”* For the next 100 days, you will hear politicians second guess decisions made in the initial stages of Covid-19 and then second guess their own second guessing. It is a hopeless exercise of what might have been and what should or could have been. But now, we deal with reality. And for me, many serious questions have arisen.

First and foremost, I ponder what is most important to me and what has value? When I visit my mother in her independent-living apartment within a much larger complex that contains assisted living and a care center, I have often seen individuals sitting outside in lawn chairs, visiting a family member through a window. This is the closest they are able to come to a parent. My **heart aches** each and every time. I recently buried the man who coached me for our neighborhood association basketball, and his family shared the grief of not being able to be with him when he was dying. These are heart wrenching stories, and yet we must honor these stories, as painful as they may be. What has transpired, has transpired. I cannot wrap my head around the science of a pandemic, and like many, I too have unanswered questions.

Gradually over the years, I have come to the realization that it is fruitless to live life based upon what **might have** been or what **should have** happened. Living life with a sense of regret over such matters is neither healthy nor our calling as Christians. We are called to be **faithful in the moment**. What are the practical implications of that? First and foremost, take the time to be with your family as you are able. After God, family comes first and staying connected is important. You will not regret it. Call a grandparent on the phone— check in on an elderly neighbor. If you are able to get out and catch a bite at a local restaurant, ask the server how he or she is doing, for often people in these service industries have suffered the most from the shutdowns.

Well, at least I am in good company with these thoughts. Tuning into the Angelus early last Sunday morning (it was the historic feast of **Sts. Joachim and Anne** on July 26), the Holy Father urged young people to reach out to their **grandparents**: “Call them, video chat with them, send them messages, listen to them, go and visit them when it is possible while observing health precautions, send them a hug.” Simple, yet sage advice. For many people, especially our seniors, time seemingly is standing still. They are **isolated** and **lonely**—we ought to acknowledge this reality. But we mustn’t be paralyzed by it. The social ills due to Covid extend beyond the medical statistics of positive cases, hospitalizations and, yes, even deaths.

It extends to our **very social fabric** and our need to remain connected to one another as a community of persons. The Church by nature is communal. Our Catechism teaches: “The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through the exchange with others, mutual service and dialogue with his brethren, man develops his potential; he thus responds to his vocation.” (CCC # 1879) As we approach the **dog days** of summer and the uncertainties about the upcoming school year, choir season and workplace protocols intensify, we are called to maintain a sense of normalcy in

our spiritual life and cling to our Lord Jesus, who remains our constant in an uncertain world.

- A Church volunteer confessed to igniting the fire at the 15th century Nantes Cathedral that destroyed its historic organ and rose window. He had been given charge to lock the Cathedral that night. His attorney shared that he was “consumed with remorse.” Did he suffer a momentary mental breakdown? In France, the **government owns** the churches (yikes!) and assumes the cost for any structural repairs. Replacing the grand organ however, falls to the parish– yikes again! The church will remain closed as they assess the structural integrity– it could take many months.
- While I have never been a purveyor of daytime television talk shows, I will say that I appreciated the joyous demeanor of TV host **Regis Philbin**. The devout Catholic died at age 88 last week. Unlike most television personalities, he never shied from noting his faith and supported Catholic education. A grad of Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx and the University of Notre Dame (he was pals with Coach Lou Holtz), his joyous faith punctuated his daily life. *Requiescat in pace*.
- Eighty-year-old **Rep. John Lewis** (D-GA.) died following a battle with pancreatic cancer. But his biggest battle was that of securing civil rights for African Americans. He was among those who marched across the **Edmund Pettus Bridge** in Selma, AL with Martin Luther King, Jr. on March 7, 1965 and he worked ever since for **peaceful** solutions to our nation’s racial ills.
- **Planned Parenthood** in New York City removed the name of founder **Margaret Sanger** from the Manhattan Health Center, due to her “harmful connections to the eugenics movement.” (translation– her racist designs to abort black babies). For this, they received **predictable plaudits** from the media. Yet, Planned Parenthood places abortion clinics in the poorest neighborhoods and **does exactly** what Sanger espoused– aborts **the lives** of the **unborn** in the womb.
- I did tune into the **Twins** “home” opener on Tuesday–it was different. Pumped in fan noise through stadium speakers? C’mon. Some cases of Covid-19 have cancelled one team’s games in Florida, leaving me with an uneasy feeling. Is this shortened season doomed from the start?

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector