

Better Than Normal

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It seems odd to say, given the way everyday life has been so transformed due to the pandemic, but for me the last few months are a blur. Weren't we just celebrating New Years a full 20 years removed from Y2K, entering a new decade with renewed commitments, resolutions still fresh in our hearts, ready to make this year our best yet?

How quickly we settled back into "normal" once our good intentions came face to face with our fragile will. 2020 isn't unique in this regard. We see the same pattern repeated year after year. Who can deny that when it comes to fundamentally changing our attitudes and behaviors for the better, the comfortable status quo can be so alluring? It's like quicksand for the will.

Little did we know this year, like it or not, "normal" was taking a long vacation and we would have no choice but to shift into everyday routines that were far from normal and certainly not easy. Practicing social distancing doesn't come naturally, nor should it. But we can adapt, especially when it's ordered to serve a greater good such as slowing the spread of a life-threatening pandemic.

It's been interesting navigating this time as a parent of young children. They do not understand the seriousness of this virus, why their favorite places are closed or their routine was so abruptly altered. They miss their friends and classmates and, more deeply, the comfort and security that can be found in the familiar and predictable.

I'm sure on some level we can all relate.

The idea of social distancing is foreign to them, thank God. Children often have a unique and innate understanding of the divine and they realize this new way of interacting doesn't match how we are wired. Although unable to fully articulate it, they recognize that we were all created in love, for love, made to love one another. And part of that love is being in community with each other, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

They may talk frequently about going back to normal when the threat of the virus passes. We can appreciate this, can't we? Over these weeks, many have expressed a longing to return to normal. It can be tempting to idealize the past when the future is unknown.

But is God really calling us to simply get back to normal? Consider one aspect of social life competing for more and more of our attention.

As we enter full throttle into another election cycle, I suspect that many of us don't want to return to a political climate that values divisiveness and discord above charity and true dialogue. Is there any doubt that is precisely what has become "normal" over recent years? Are there serious differences among us regarding how to build a society that allows for human flourishing? Certainly. Do we need to dig deeply into those differences and articulate those clearly? Absolutely. But first, and most importantly, we need to commit to the fundamental values and principles that flow from authentic love.

As a Catholic, it's been a suffering to be away from Mass these recent weeks but it has reminded me to not simply view my faith as something lived and professed only within the four walls of a church. As Christians, we worship a living God and practice and profess a living faith. This faith calls each of us to make our life, our very self, a gift to one another. This was beautifully demonstrated by the care, concern, and protection we showed toward the most vulnerable among us in recent weeks. This kind of love must serve as the pillar of any just and moral society and it ought to be a hallmark of our political discourse and our public policy.

Coronavirus and the policy framework that has arisen as a result, have made us keenly aware of the value of human life, the need to promote the common good and the absolute requirement that we live our lives in solidarity with others. It is a lie to believe that only some lives matter, that there are degrees of human dignity, that society is best served when we all look out for ourselves to the exclusion of our neighbors, or that economic efficiency or autonomy are the greatest human goods.

So, as we enter into this time of reopening, let us enter into a spiritual reopening as well asking God to reopen our hearts to him so that we may be his hands and feet in our communities. Let us pray for the grace to not simply go back to a lukewarm normal, but instead carry forward the important work in which we have participated these last few months—caring for the most vulnerable, helping those in need and living out the profound, yet all too often ignored, truth that in belonging to God, we belong to each other.