

I would like to call everyone's attention to the introduction in the bulletin of *Beacons of Light*. Copies of the bulletin are available on the parish website as well as here in church. Please be sure to see the Archdiocese's one page flyer of the same title also available in church or online.

One thing I think we should all be thankful for is that real emergencies that require immediate and decisive action occur very infrequently for most of us. For those who make it their profession to handle such emergencies on a daily basis, I don't know how you do it, but thank you and God bless you for doing it. For the rest of us, when those rare events happen, it seems like there is always that first few seconds of stunned horror, then a few more when we all wait for someone else to do something. Then, someone with the knowledge and intestinal fortitude steps up and does something, and thank God they do. Most of us, I think we would have to admit, hope someone else does step up even if we, ourselves, could handle the problem. We're too busy, we don't want to get involved, we're afraid, we're lazy; whatever the reason we hope someone else will step up and take care of the problem, it seems almost universal that humans want someone else to step up and sort things out for us.

We see this dynamic in our first reading. Isaiah complains to God about the disbelief and unfaithfulness of the people, and he wants God to do something about it. He wants God to tear open the heavens and come down, force the issue, put on a big show and make, yes make the people return to God. Somewhere, in the long line of the prophet of Israel, they finally realized that God wasn't going to make anyone do anything. The people could either follow the ways of God and experience the benefits of doing so, or they could go their own way and reap the benefit or consequences of doing that. This truth is what Jesus' admonition in today's Gospel hinges on; stay alert, Jesus says, because if you don't there will be consequences.

Even though we've known this spiritual truth for over 2000 years, we still haven't learned its lesson. We still want God to make this or that person stop acting in this or that way or start acting in some way

that we think is better. We want God to make them stop thinking like they do and start thinking like we want them to think. But God doesn't do that. It would mean taking away that person's freedom. He won't take away someone's freedom even to stop them from sinning. But many of us still keep thinking and praying like that's exactly what we want God to do. No God isn't going to step in and sort things out just because we think he should.

And if we are really disciples of Jesus, asking God to step in and sort things out is asking God to do our job for us. People sometimes say when faced with some human tragedy, "Why doesn't God do something?" Excuse me? God has given you two hands, two feet and a fully functional brain, why don't you do something? "It's too much effort." "It will take too much resource." "Where will all the money come from?" "Besides all that, December has an "R" in it." When we humans really want something to happen, we can find a way. Our ability to confront and, now with vaccines coming on line, overcome the corona virus proves this. Everything else is just an excuse for our laziness, or fear or greed or some other failing. It's these failings that have created the vast majority of human misery in every age and in every place, and have made messes all over a world that was originally created to be very good. God has given us every good thing, including the wherewithal to clean up our own messes, and to help each other deal with the realities of living as temporary creatures in this world. And our sinfulness has made a complete bollix of that.

The mess we've made with the help of sin is monumental. Any word I choose to describe how big the problem is would be an understatement. So where does such a huge cleanup begin? Jesus chose to begin the cleanup at the same place and level that the mess started, in the individual human heart. That's not so big. That's doable. Not on our own, but with Jesus' help, it's doable. "But my heart isn't a mess." Friend, that's the sin of pride talking. And not knowing that there is a mess or what the problem is, is a common situation. If that sounds like you, start with the 10 Commandments and the 7 deadly sins. Google them. Read a couple articles on each, paying attention to

which group or agency sponsors that website. Believe it or not, there are wackos publishing warped nonsense on the internet. Of course, you can also read a book on the subject. Identifying what you need to work on is half the battle. The next step is searching for ways to combat the sin you've identified. Building the virtue that is the opposite of that sin is the traditional and often best practice for confronting sin. Also, **get yourself to confession** - socially distanced, of course. The grace of the sacrament reminds us that we are more than just our sins. It can give us practical helps to confronting sin. And speaking our sins, putting them on the table, so to speak, often makes them smaller and more manageable than the monsters we create in our own minds. And there is nothing better than hearing Jesus say, your sins are forgiven, go in peace. Did you notice that this whole process assumes and requires that you are a willing participant, a partner with Christ in repairing the damage of sin? That's how it works.

And one thing I should mention. Sin has made some really tangled messes in our world. Remember I said that God has given us the wherewithal to clean up our messes? One of the greatest things God has given us in Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit alive within us. When we work in accord with that Spirit we work with the power of God. And nothing can withstand the power of God. If you believe this, all things are possible.