

Presence, Protest, Praise: spiritual currency

Dear saints,

As we gingerly regather in person, we do so with the clarity that we can make responsible decisions every moment of every day. We wash our hands, keep our distance in public, avoid unsafe crowding, wear a mask, test when possible and when in doubt, stay at home. Schools and colleges, hospitals, and nursing homes are opening up more. We are grateful for all the sacrifice and faithfulness.

One of the toughest things about this “age of COVID” is that we have not been able to interact in person with friends and acquaintances. If we are fortunate to have the ability to connect online, that is great, but many are unable to do so. *Presence* is significant to meaning making. The wisdom from South Africa embodied in UBUNTU is very simply, “I am because you are.” We are interconnected and our physical isolation has deprived us of this gift. Counterintuitively, however, our retreat has also enhanced our longing and joy when we do connect with each other in person or online. Thank you for taking on the new challenges of adapting to the emotional exhaustion that is a part of the Zoom world to keep our connectivity intact and safe. You are a gift, just as you are! I give thanks for your presence in our world.

When we realized we were being hit with this novel coronavirus in March, we went into what can be characterized as *protest* mode. We paused to quickly learn everything we could about it. We became aware. We then became belligerent and went on a war footing to protect and explore cures. After that we learned to make compromises like having a mask handy when we are out walking in public, etc. We also dealt with disappointment in that not everyone was really concerned about others when it came to wearing masks, for instance. We have done a lot to resist and protest against the COVID-19 virus so that we would become a more egalitarian world where all of us can share the same kind of freedoms. We could have done better because, as of today, over 197,000 people have died because of the virus. The loss of the gift that each life represents is hard to fathom. We lament this catastrophic loss of life. Going forward, I pray that all of us will be even more compassionate about loving our neighbor.

So, there you have it: Awareness, Belligerence, Compromise, Disappointment, and Equality. The ABCDE of protest. These layers may apply to other kinds of protest, too. When I say protest, I mean non-violent protest. Rochester is on the radar revealing a lack of equality examined around the world. In the inhumane death of Daniel Prude in March we see a confluence of the mental and moral health crisis we face as a nation. We are in this historic moment of protests against American Casteism—the pandemic from 1493, initiated by the virus called Doctrine of Discovery and 1619, when the first African slaves arrived in the colony of Virginia. One concern I have is that protests are absolute, calling for everyone in local authority to resign as a broad-brush strategy. I am not sure it is wise. It reminds me of an old truism, “to a guy with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

Finally, *praise* is an important currency for our time. We are depleted of emotional capital and need each other to remember why we matter. As we travel together, let us praise God who is with us. Let us be kind, genuine, and generous in our honest praise of others.

We pray for our preparation for safe and fair elections, for those impacted by fires, hurricanes, and other existential illnesses. We also pray for the recovery of two policemen in the Compton shooting. I love you and am holding you all in prayer during this challenging season. Be safe and be well.

With affection,



Prince