

Dear saints,

India is an ancient civilization with time tested virtues and defects. As with most aspirational nuggets, a virtue mined out of an ancient anthology of poems in my mother tongue, Tamil seems relevant. Kaniyan Poongundranar, in *Purananru* wrote these words 3000 years ago, யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர்—yaadhum oore yaavarum kelir, which means, “I am a world citizen, and everyone is my own kith and kin.”

This universal truth is at the heart of all the major world religions and philosophies. They certainly are teachings of Jesus who called his followers to treat each person as a member of one human family. *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*—John 13:34-35. In Matthew 25 we see Christ bring this home by teaching that what we do or do not do to enhance our vulnerable neighbor impacts God’s family.

We have a Presidential election coming and we have a divided nation in terms of political parties and affiliated visions. While we have a clear commitment to gospel imperatives, we do not promote any particular political party in the church. I do want to remind us that we are citizens and residents of America together and that is more important than our different party affiliations. Each of us can do our part to strengthen our unity because our differences make us better together—*E Pluribus Unum*. Out of the many kith and kin, we are one family.

This has been a summer like no other. As of today, over 172 thousand people in our country, and over 782 thousand people worldwide have died due to COVID-19. New York and the northeast have recently done better than most of the rest of the country. Many of you are preparing to regather in person and online, and some of you have started doing so already. I commend you for the great job you have done so far. We cannot take any of this for granted. May we be responsible and cautious as we continue on this path with diligence, grace, and hope. In the words of Dr. Anthony Fauci, who recently spoke to the bishops and canons, “This pandemic will end.”

The past months have been spiritually tough and enriching for me since I have been listening to truth, developing new life-giving practices, learning, relearning, and unlearning. Let me tell you a little about what I have done to engage this time meaningfully. I slowed down enough to address things I have avoided engaging with people close to me. I have realized that truth-telling and respectfully receiving it is only possible when we make time for it. *Really grateful*. Honestly, this work has been hard, humbling, and revealing. I realize that I need to find a healthier balance between my family and church. One would think I would have figured this out by now. Apparently, I have work to do. Much of life is about reflecting on what you see in your rear-view mirror. The mirror is usually held by people close to you. But only when we pause can we look in the mirror. The reflection is a time-sensitive gift to behold. It may be hard to absorb at first and may deserve wise corrective actions. In a strange way, it is liberating to acknowledge imperfections.

When I zoom this wisdom out and take a Birdseye view of our civilization, I realize that most of our discriminations have more to do with choosing between being wholesome or being

unhealthy. Between choosing to be a happy or a dysfunctional family, a recovering or a diseased body, a healed or a fractured community. The whole world has been exposed by this pandemic for how hierarchical we are in treating other human beings who are our kith and kin.

I am a diabetic. It is an illness. When I first found out a few years ago and started treatment for it, I also started learning about it. I have changed my lifestyle by unlearning habits that make it worse and by learning new life-giving habits to help me overcome my dis-ease. I don't think it helps to go around blaming the doctor who told me I have a disease. Instead, it would be wise to take responsibility for my malady.

Dealing with the reality that our country's caste system that has functioned out of the assumption that some people's lives are more important than other people's lives is like an illness. On the celebratory occasion of the 100th anniversary of Women's right to vote we notice the gap that was normal then because black women did not count as human enough to vote; it wasn't until fifty years later that all black women could actually vote. We are wise to acknowledge this dis-ease, take responsibility, and then get on the recovery and healing path. Diabetes, COVID-19, divisiveness, and more are dis-eases that we can and will heal from if we act responsibly. The next generation of leaders is going to help us heal our sin-sick souls and become a healthier country and world. It helps to travel together, especially when we are recovering from such dis-ease. I commend engaging the authors of *Unsettling Truth* online on October 24 @ 9 AM. (More information to come!)

Developing life-giving practices has been a source of great comfort and joy for many during this pandemic. I have heard of many new bakers, woodworkers, painters, and gardeners who are emerging from this season. I have never been a gardener before, but I am now. Starting from scratch I have been humbled to watch tomatoes, cayenne peppers, and eggplants grow from seedlings I planted just a few months ago. It is, to put it simply, therapeutic. Please share your healing practices and what you are discovering about the mystery of love and life.

I also have been learning and relearning quite a bit by reading several books. Notable among these are *Unsettling Truths* by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Talking to Strangers* by Malcolm Gladwell, *Humankind: a hopeful history* by Rutger Bregman, and *Caste: The origins of our discontent* by Isabel Wilkerson. I am learning, relearning, and unlearning some.

My beloved, let us follow Jesus our servant-leader with authenticity. Let us heal our divisions by listening, healing, and learning. Our better angels are compassionate, informed, and forgiving and not indifferent, ignorant, and vengeful. May we spiritually draw closer to each other during this election season to create a more peaceful and hopeful future for ourselves and our children! Thank you for all you do to make us one human family, kith and kin, under God!

With affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A.L.S.' followed by a stylized flourish.

Prince