



Faith in the Time of Corona

Every once in a while, there is something that is posted on a social media site that catches my eye. Recently I came across this brief vignette.

Once all the villagers decided to pray for rain. On the day of prayer, all the people gathered, but only one boy came with an umbrella. That is faith.

That little story certainly struck a chord with me. Too often we confuse “faith” with “wishful thinking”. We wish things would be different. We wish that people would get better. We wish that the virus would be gone. But as the old saying goes, “Wishing doesn’t make it so.”

And while faith may not be a solution to what confronts us, it does shape our outlook in life. Being a person of faith does not mean magical thinking. Nor does it mean that we abdicate our responsibility. But it does mean that we believe in the efficacy of prayer to not just change the world, but to change our lives.

Tradition teaches, “The one who rises from prayer a better person, his prayer is answered.” The point isn’t whether the answer is yes or no as a response to the prayer. The lesson of this saying is that prayer in its essence allows us a window into our soul. It allows us to understand who we are at our core; and what it is we truly hope for. There are moments in time when that understanding is clear. But I would argue it isn’t as clear as we might think at first glance. For example, when our loved ones are very ill, do we pray that they will get better? What if they suffer from an incurable disease? Is that prayer for life really what we hope for? Prayer is not meant to alter the laws of nature, but to allow us to accept, understand and find comfort in these laws, even when those laws are not easy to accept.

The boy who brought an umbrella wasn’t wishing it would rain. He felt it would rain. His faith gave him strength in a time of great uncertainty and drought. I would imagine if the villagers uttered their prayers and it still did not rain, that most would be disappointed, but that little boy would find a way to move beyond disappointment, and make his way through to the next day, and the next, knowing deep down that even if rain did not come, somehow the village would survive. The boy understood that the act of praying brought them together, and in so doing, brought them strength, courage, and the determination to help each other.

As Rabbi Jack Reimer so wisely noted, we can not merely pray to you O God to end despair, starvation, war or disease because God has given *us* the capacity to change our world for the better. Therefore, Rabbi Reimer concludes wisely:

*We pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination, and willpower,
To do, instead of just to pray,
To become, instead of merely to wish.*