

January 17, 2021

Dear Friends,

Three weeks ago, I was given the news that a friend who is a friar in a monastery in PA got Covid, and we were asked to pray for him and his brother who also had it. They both survived, but since then three friars and their cook perished from this insidious virus. While I was attending the funeral for the cook, who I have been friends with since 1992, a fifth friar died. His funeral is being webcasted this morning. I knew them all. As I was sitting in the back of the church for the funeral of my friend the cook, I had flashbacks to when I performed his wedding in that very same church, when he and his wife, who was our parish secretary, were celebrating the happiest day of their lives. Now sitting on this cold, marble bench, as I looked upon his wife, seated alone, masked, and shaking in the front pew, the image was annihilated.

Here, deep in the season of winter, when days are short and nights are long, we have all been forced to deal with the reality of death in ways we never imagined or ever wanted to imagine. What used to be far-away news stories or tragedies that happened to ‘somebody else’ are now flagrantly and ruthlessly being flung into our faces. This is a time marked by loss for certain. But it is also a time of survival.

To find hope in the darkness of winter, our ancestors would light candles and yule logs, a tradition of light in darkness that we see played out in modern times with holiday lights and menorahs. And there is the ancient Chinese proverb that says: “It’s better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

I have spent an awful lot of time and energy ‘cursing the darkness’ at many different times in my life. When I do it, I usually find it somewhat cathartic and releasing. But if I continue to curse and curse and curse, I wind up becoming quite depressed and anxious, feeling alone, empty, and hopeless. It helps to curse the darkness, but it doesn’t make it go away. It helps to curse the darkness, but finding ways to accept that it is as much a part of our reality as light can be even more helpful. “Despair is one of grief’s most potent weapons. As long as we are alive there is hope for us, but grief often blots it out. In a total solar eclipse, the sun does not

go away, it is only hidden behind the shadow cast upon it. In the total eclipse of hope, hope is merely hidden behind the shadow cast by grief.” (Jan Warner, Grief Day by Day)

So today, at least, I am going to light a candle instead of spending my time and energy cursing the darkness. As I light this candle, I will pray for all those we have lost, for all those currently suffering, for all those bravely and tirelessly trying to save them, and for all those living in despair and darkness. As I light this candle, I will invite Light into my own heart, into theirs, and into yours as well.

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin

P.S.... Yes there is a post-script this week. When I finished writing my reflection above, I did in fact light a candle and placed it in my window (a flameless candle- after two house fires, no more real ones for me). I sat and meditated and prayed for a bit, and when I finished, I looked at my phone. I received a text from a friend who sat next to me at the funeral that I was writing about just a few minutes before. He lived in the friary where there was so much loss. He invited me to travel across the state to have an early Sunday dinner with him in one of our favorite restaurants; it is quite safe and socially distant. He said he needed to get out and do something. I felt the same way, and so I immediately accepted his invitation. As I drove back across the state after having had a delightful time with him and an excellent meal, I was feeling better, and I realized that there certainly is more than one way to light a candle.