

April 14, 2020

Dear Friends,

It is Easter Monday morning as I write this reflection. Outside a nor'easter is raging, and as the brutal winds batter the cold, hard rain onto my window panes, I can't see too much through them because it is so dark and dreary. This is Easter? This is downright depressing. Ironically I am grateful we are stuck inside because I certainly don't want to go out into that tempest today. How long has it been now? Is it really Monday or is it still Sunday or is it Tuesday? It's surreal.

Kathleen Norris, an author and poet, who wrote many books in the past suddenly stopped. She disappeared from the literary radar screen. When she was asked why, she explained that she had to take care of her dying husband and mother. She slipped into a funk, which she describes as *acedia*. *Acedia* is an ancient word that basically describes the experience of the inability to care, even to the extent that you can't care - that you don't care anymore. It's sort of a really drastic, nasty form of indifference. She finally wrote her latest book entitled: "*Acedia & Me*," in which she says: "How can I find my way in this impenetrable darkness? I need to begin again, after I have been worn down to almost nothing by *acedia*. The danger in lowering one's standards, with *acedia*, is that one might accommodate oneself to less and less, until one is lowered right out of existence. I ask myself why I am so willing to waste time, as if it were not a gift, mindlessly consuming and discarding my precious mortal life."

There are so many good reasons lately that we can slip into *acedia*, but we must protect ourselves from falling into deep despair and giving up. This Corona crisis will not last forever - there will be a breaking point when we will be able to leave our self-imposed prisons. The dreary weather will eventually, and seemingly begrudgingly, give into Spring awakening and rebirth, but as Alan Wolfelt says, even "Spring's energy can seem cruel when we are grieving. We may feel that nature's reawakening is disrespectful and hard to stomach." So in grief even the beauty of a changing season can trigger *acedia*.

Kathleen Norris shares how she broke out of the deep pit in which she found herself: "A way when where there is no way; this is what God, and only God, can provide. This is salvation. As we move from death to life. We experience grace, a force as real as gravity, and are reminded of its presence in the changing of the seasons, and in the dying of the seeds from which new life emerges, so that even our deserts may bloom." Kathleen's remarkable recovery was rooted in prayer, even when she didn't know what to say or how to say it - she simply put herself into God's presence and sat with her feelings. She often prayed the psalms because there she found words to match her emotions when she could not be in touch with

her own. She shared that this as well as exercise and reaching out of herself toward others was key to her own reemergence into new life.

Alan Wolfelt concluded yesterday's meditation by saying: "It's ok not to enjoy Spring this year. It's ok to rail against the unfairness and cruelty. At the same time, if we are gentle with ourselves, we will heed our hearts and pay attention to our moments of tenderness." In allowing ourselves to feel whatever we are feeling we need to remember that we will not remain there forever; feelings and emotions change and evolve. We really do need to give ourselves permission to mourn and then eventually, after the tempests and pathogens have passed, after grief has taken enough of our life from us, after we have had it with acedia, we will notice the darkness lifting and the subtle but surprising invitation that is gently offered to us as light begins to pour through the darkness. That will be the true beginning of Spring for all of us. Let us live in the expectation of new life, and welcome it when it springs forth.

***God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.***

Peace and Serenity, Kevin