

March 29, 2020
A Note from Father Phil

A heart attack was one of the best things that ever happened to my uncle. He was an imposing man: physically, intellectually and temperamentally. He stood about six feet tall and was built like an athlete. Some scouts invited him to try out as a catcher for the Chicago Cubs. But, my uncle had other ideas. He went to the seminary and was ordained a priest. He became the rector of a seminary and ran it like a military camp. Later, he became a hard-nosed pastor of a large parish. Words like disciplined, fair, smart, and intimidating were used to describe him.

And then, late in life, he had his heart attack. And something wonderful happened. The man was still smart, fair, and disciplined, but he also seemed to know better what was important and what was not. He would take walks daily around the neighborhood and stop in and chat with new friends. He told jokes. He listened. He read books and articles by authors other than theologians just because he was curious and wanted to learn something new. And, there seemed to be a gentleness about him. A lightness of being.

What that heart attack did for my uncle, I am hoping the coronavirus will do for me and many others this Lent. Make us focus on what is truly important. To blow off all that is not God.

Our readings for this Sunday of Lent are about new life. The prophet Ezekiel did not address the bones of people like those buried at our Cluster parish cemeteries, but, rather, people like you and me who are alive, but may feel as dry as a bone. Likewise, Paul pointed out to the community at Rome that the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwelt within them. Raising them to life. Now. At this very moment. And Jesus' command to the corpse of his friend, Lazarus, is spoken to each of us: "Come Out." Let the real person come forward and live. Emerge from the darkness and decay of the tomb that you have dug for yourself and begin to live. Really live.

Here are a few suggestions to help us fulfill Jesus' command to "Come out" of the tomb and live: (1) Pray as you can, not as you can't, (2) Embrace today, (3) Forgive, (4) Learn something new, (5) Look for God in the Ordinary, and (6) Fill out your Census Form. Surely things we can do even as we self distance. Things that can help us focus on knowing, loving and serving God. To focus on the very reason we were created. Maybe the coronavirus will do for us what a heart attack did for my uncle. Make us better people.