Columns
Coronavirus
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Arek Adeoye)



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Early morning the walkers appear. The first is 40-ish with a bun in back and a small dog on a leash. The two walk an easy, measured pace the length of the sidewalk, all their own in the morning sunshine. Every day he wears a different set of clothes. When he returns home, he pulls them off, throws them in the washer, and feeds the dog.

Ten minutes later, his counterpart appears, ramrod tall, hands in pocket, a steady, no nonsense military pace. Sometimes in black jacket, tan pants, every day different clothes, every day the same walk, taking the air, five blocks down and five blocks back. Unchanging in the upheaval of change.

And if they should forget the upheaval, news bulletins puncture the air with dire warnings. *Wear a mask once you step outside your door. Gloves are a good idea, too. Keep your distance, 6 to 8 feet, and forget handshakes and fist bumps, to say nothing of embraces. Perhaps a long- distance nod now and then. Above all, wash your hands. Frequently.*

Down a small slope and into the park, a young girl and her two dogs ignore all dire warnings. They have the whole, green place to themselves. She's unmasked, they're unleashed, playing in happy abandon — toss two balls, fetch, return, leap up on her, until she tosses the balls again, white in the green grass. There's no virus in the park, as far as she knows, only early morning joy in the sunlight.

The young man gets off the 7:20 bus, every morning the same. He is short, intent, bent over a bit, walking always in the street that knows little traffic. Same bus, same time, different clothes, with a cell phone in one hand, a bag of breakfast in the other. One hand heavy with warning, the other hand light with gift.

Slow of pace, the masked man walks with cap pulled low, not much face visible. He has the sidewalk to himself, now, the same with the sky, the sleeping houses, the green park a gentle slope down — all of it his in the early morning. One day slides into the next, so he tends to lose track.



(Unsplash/Sebastiano Piazzi)

*There will come soft rains* to freckle the sleeping windows. Then the walker in tan pants dons a navy jacket and hood, the same, military stride, a small closed umbrella in his hand. He walks right, while one street over a young girl in pink and her small dog sprint left, down the long length of hill. Then back up. She takes the hill lightly, she and her dog in the rain.

All the walkers and dogs are cleansed in the soft rains. So, too, the air, the trees, the birds floating without batting a wing, the houses, and all the sleepers who toss and turn.

Next to the park, the church doors are closed now. Holy water fonts, a thing of the past.

No matter. There will come soft rains blessing every waking, sleeping, steadfast, fearful, loving child of God.



(Unsplash/T.Q.)

One day there will come bright sunlight to rouse the sleepers from their beds. They will rub the webs from their eyes and give thanks for the new day. Then they will take yesterday's clothes and yesterday's beliefs and scrub them clean, hanging them out to dry. There will come a deep airing of all they thought was true, and, oh, so necessary.

Mostly they will learn to hold onto each other as never before, even while they, themselves, float and flutter, doing a line dance in the cloudless sky.

And there will come great joy because the Word is made flesh among them and wears their humanity, out on the line.

Always has. Always will.

[Joan Sauro, a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, publishes widely in the Catholic press. "We were called Sister" (U.S. Catholic) was awarded first place for Best Essay 2014 by the CPA. ]

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