Columns
Spirituality



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March 2, 2022

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I'm not a fan of the end of the liturgical year. The "gloom and doom" Scriptures about end times and judgment are hard for me to listen to and pray with. I just don't know what to with those messages. Sure enough, at the end of the last liturgical season I found myself at Mass with the most challenging preacher I've ever heard. He started his homily by saying, "The world is coming to an end … and it should!" That got my attention.

Father went on to explain the world that was coming to an end isn't necessarily our planet, although Mother Earth is in peril, but rather it is the world we are the center of. The "it's all about me" world we each live in at least some of the time is the one that needs to come to an end, and fast. It was an interesting message, one I promptly forgot about once I left Mass.

But apparently, Father's message was one I needed to hear as the coming weeks kept showing me just how often I live in the "it’s all about me" world.

As I'm sure is the case in many of our communities, there are numerous invitations to discernment to consider: Will you serve on committee X? Will you put/leave your name in nomination for Y? There is a need for ministry Z you need to consider. Each invitation to discernment brought with it a reflection that included some thought of how and what I would be asked to change. Father's message about ending the "all about me" world surfaced frequently and was just as frequently ignored.

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I minister in a high school. Except for a few very early months of the pandemic (March-June, 2020), we have been in session. That's not as nice and neat as it sounds. Our structure and student instruction remain in flux as we negotiate in-person and virtual school and the switching back and forth that happens when infections rise; vaccine and mask mandates; best practices for student learning; and so forth. We've been limiting contact, quarantining and testing people in the school and associated community for about two years and there is no end in sight.

I had little patience for people who didn't understand my declining to take on any additional activities. I was concerned about catching or spreading the coronavirus, and I was tired. My experiences are valid — then Father's homily came back. I was living in the "all about me" world, oblivious to the needs of anyone other than

myself. As much as I wanted to avoid contact with anyone, there were others who craved and needed it, even virtually. Point taken, but once again I forgot Father's message.

My nieces and nephew are on their own, with their first adult responsibilities and careers. They want (and need) to be with their friends when they come home. I thought we'd be able to spend some extended time together over the holidays. I was wrong; our time together was minimal and I found myself returning home cranky. My immediate family is small, five in total, and we're used to being together for holidays. We don’t really do anything special; we just kind of "are." It took a little soul-searching to realize my wants were as valid as theirs. Though their time at home can't be "all about me," and we all have the technology to keep in touch. Father's point was reinforced — and forgotten again.

Settling in for prayer after a particularly challenging few days, I found myself lamenting some recent circumstances and challenges. God could show up and help at any time. I needed (or did I simply want?) comfort, not challenge. Once again Father's words were right there. Life is not all about me. It never has been and it never should be. God was very much present in the ways I needed; I simply wasn't liking it. Over time I owned that and my prayer became gentler as I let God take the lead.

So here I am, months later, at the beginning of Lent, with a line from a homily that I can't seem to avoid. Prayer, family, ministry and community — in the midst of every aspect of life, and more often than I care to admit, I found myself wanting the world to be all about me. I could no longer try to deny or ignore Father's message; it was very clear and, I'm somewhat ashamed to admit, very applicable.

Why was I frustrated with the slow drivers? They delayed *me.* Why the irritation with the person who left their shopping cart in the middle of the aisle? It inconvenienced *me*. Why the eyeroll at a colleague's seemingly stupid question? It slowed *me* down. The list could go on and on. What exactly makes me think I should be the center of the universe? I know better. I was not raised that way. And this is definitely not what my vows profess. Ouch!

I had fallen way deep into "it’s all about me" and I didn't like what I was seeing. So now what? I could place blame on being tired or overextended or simply having a bad day. All true. And all excuses. Clearly Father's long-ago homily was exactly what I needed to help me bring *my* world to an end. I'm not always successful, but I'm

trying. I've not heard that preacher since that Sunday ending the liturgical year, so I may be just about ready to hear him preach again … or not.