



New Apostolic Church USA

Passiontide and Pandemic - Written by Apostle John Fendt
March 25, 2020

There is a saying – we do not have problems, only opportunities. At times, this saying is utilized in all seriousness, but often, it is simply said in a joking manner in the face of difficulty. In the context of our Christian life, from the perspective of our relationship with the Lord, this saying is always true.

Everything that we experience in life, both the positive and the negative, is an opportunity to demonstrate who we are - true followers of Jesus Christ who embrace every moment as an opportunity to demonstrate to Him that we love Him. In this context, the circumstance that the coronavirus pandemic presents to us is no different from any other. However, in the context of the Church calendar, where the difficulties connected with the coronavirus occur during Passiontide, we have a special opportunity to demonstrate who we truly are, and in addition, to develop a deeper understanding for Christ's passion.

When Jesus came to earth, He willingly entered this realm as a man and the fellowship with His Father was altered. Throughout His life on earth, He made a determined effort to preserve this fellowship through prayer. However, in order to make the eternally valid sacrifice that would offer freedom from sin to all humankind, it was necessary for Him to voluntarily give His life on the cross. This sacrifice was much more than giving up the life of His human form. It required that He experience the separation from God, which accompanies death. Jesus Christ was devoted to His heavenly Father and spoke of returning to the Father. In the midst of His suffering on the cross, He cried out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!"* We cannot begin to imagine the anguish He suffered in being totally separated from the Father, the anguish of being distant from God.

We are living in a unique time as New Apostolic Christians. We have an opportunity for growth in understanding and self-reflection. The pandemic has put us in the position that we are not able to share in communion with Christ as has been customary for us. The closeness with Christ that we normally experience in the divine service is not possible. Surely, no other human experience can be compared with the suffering of Jesus on the cross. However we have the opportunity to possibly understand better than ever before, what it means to be separated from Him, to not be able to have the close fellowship with Him we enjoy in the divine service experience.

These thoughts lead to self-reflection. How precious is it to me to be permitted to share in communion with my Lord and Savior? How deep is my longing to once again be permitted to share in this deep fellowship?

However, does it simply end there? Consider how desperately we long for the pandemic, with all its attendant difficulties, to be finished. We wish we knew what the timeline was, and how long it will take for things to get back to normal. These thoughts seem to occupy us constantly. Not knowing can bring concern and awaken fear.

Which longing is more profound? Which longing forces me to my knees more often? The desperate wish for the pandemic to be finished or the heartfelt longing for eternal fellowship with the Lord? When considering the future, which day do I look forward to with greater joy?

Passiontide is a time for reflection – time to reflect on the enormity of Christ's sacrifice for me and time to reflect on my own, personal priorities.