

REFLECTION FROM . . .



FATHER JOHN NGUYEN
CHAPLAIN, GUERIN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL



MAY 22, 2020

GRATITUDE

This Friday will be the last day of school for our seniors and I am amazed how fast this school year has flown by. As I reflect on this school year, I was thinking about some of the homilies I have given at our all school Masses. I remember the theme of the homily at my first all school Mass was gratitude and I shared how it is one of my favorite subjects to talk, teach, and preach about. So, I thought it would be a nice symmetry to end the school year with the same theme as I started. During this time of quarantine, it can be very easy for us to dwell on all the things that we have lost. The lost time we could have had together, all of the canceled activities, and of course all of the family and friends who have been directly impacted especially with over 93,000 people dying from the Coronavirus in the United States alone. One of the images that I often compare this quarantine time to is the journey through the desert by the people of Israel in the book of Exodus. Like the people of Israel, it can be very easy for to complain and be angry with God for the hardship and suffering that we have to endure. The grace that is available to all of us is the grace to still recognize that our lives have so many blessings that we should be grateful for even amidst the challenges that we face. I am reminded of Saint Paul's letter to the Romans where we read: *"Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us."* (Rom 5:3-5).

In this trimester of teaching I had the great privilege of being with two classes of seniors and I am often tempted to think about how differently this trimester could have been. My students are so talented, creative, full of joy, and help me to grow every time I have the opportunity to interact with them. It would be easy for me to be bitter about having to lead an eLearning class but instead each day I have the choice to be grateful for the time I have with my students even if it is through electronic means. I never fail to get some great laughs every time I read their daily reflections and as I have been able to share a small part of their grief journey I have recognized one of the hardest part teaching is the limited amount of time we share with our students. The limited time we get to share with any person is a reminder that we are not supposed to cling to our life on Earth since in is only in Heaven when we will have eternity to spend with each other. As the Class of 2020 prepares for their next adventure, one thing I would share with them is to strive to be thankful for hardships because we often grow the most during hardships. My yearlong deployment in Afghanistan was full of hardships but I would not trade that time for anything in the world. It was through that deployment that I discovered and developed a level of strength and resiliency that I never knew I had. A fundamental Catholic teaching is that God will never test us beyond our ability, so we should not be afraid to be challenged and stretched. May God who knows us better than we know ourselves continue to protect, guide, and even challenge us so that each one of us may fulfill our potential to be saints.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Nguyen", with a long, sweeping underline.