A timely reflection from Richard Rohr

Love Alone Overcomes Fear
Thursday, March 19, 2020

It is shocking to think how much the world has changed in such a brief time. Each of us has had our lives and communities disrupted. Of course, I am here in this with you. I feel that I'm in no position to tell you how to feel or how to think, but there are a few things that come to mind I will share.

A few days ago I was encouraged by the Franciscans and by the leadership team here at the CAC to self-quarantine, so I've been in my little hermitage now for three or four days. I've had years of practice, literally, how to do what we are calling "social distancing." I have a nice, large yard behind me where there are four huge, beautiful cottonwood trees, and so I walk my dog Opie every few hours.

Right now I'm trying to take in psychologically, spiritually, and personally, what is God trying to say? When I use that phrase, I'm not saying that God causes suffering to teach us good things. But God does use everything, and if God wanted us to experience global solidarity, I can't think of a better way. We all have access to this suffering, and it bypasses race, gender, religion, and nation.

We are in the midst of a highly teachable moment. There's no doubt that this period will be referred to for the rest of our lifetimes. We have a chance to go deep, and to go broad. Globally, we're in this together. Depth is being forced on us by great suffering, which as I like to say, always leads to great love.

But for God to reach us, we have to allow suffering to wound us. Now is no time for an academic solidarity with the world. Real solidarity needs to be felt and suffered. That's the real meaning of the word "suffer" – to allow someone else's pain to influence us in a real way. We need to move beyond our own personal feelings and take in the whole. This, I must say, is one of the gifts of television: we can turn it on and see how people in countries other than our own are hurting. What is going to happen to those living in isolated places or for those who don't have health care? Imagine the fragility of the most marginalized, of people in prisons, the homeless, or even the people performing necessary services, such as ambulance drivers, nurses, and doctors, risking their lives to keep society together? Our feelings of urgency and devastation are not exaggeration: they are responding to the real human situation. We're not pushing the panic button; we are the panic button. And we have to allow these feelings, and invite God's presence to hold and sustain us in a time of collective prayer and lament.

I hope this experience will force our attention outwards to the suffering of the most vulnerable. Love always means going beyond yourself to otherness. It takes two. There has to be the

lover and the beloved. We must be stretched to an encounter with otherness, and only then do we know it's love. This is what we call the subject-subject relationship. Love alone overcomes fear and is the true foundation that lasts (1 Corinthians 13:13).