

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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When I was growing up, I was told hindsight is valuable but foresight is even more so. With hindsight you learn from your past mistakes and so hopefully not repeat them. Foresight is the ability to anticipate what is going to happen before it does and so be prepared for it. Although experience can help people develop foresight, it also requires the ability to use that experience in the right way.

In today's Gospel, Jesus prays to his Father not just for his disciples but also those "who will believe in me through their word" (future generations). When Jesus prayed these words he knew his time on earth would soon be over. He had done everything he could to get his disciples prepared for a future without him. They had heard his teachings, seen his miracles and witnessed his example. Although their behaviour during his Passion and Death demonstrated the weakness of their faith, it was restored when the risen Christ appeared to them. However, the timeframe of Jesus extended beyond them. At his appearance on Easter evening, Jesus told his disciples they were being sent to continue his mission and received the power to forgive and retain sins through the Holy Spirit. Christ's prayer during the Last Supper foreshadowed this future mission but also indicated it would extend though all time and space. Future generations (like ours) were as much of a concern to Jesus as the apostles. The fullness of truth about God's saving plan for humanity would need to be preserved and transmitted by the apostles so these spiritual descendants could receive it. This work would require great care and foresight.

Catholics and other people of faith understand they are the recipients of long traditions of religious experience. These traditions are founded upon divine revelation and many generations of collective reflection upon it. They provide the faithful with the hindsight necessary to trace the development of beliefs and learn from past mistakes both individual and communal. As a result, believers can face present conditions with a sense of stability and confidence. Yet, there always exists the danger of living in the past rather than learning from it. Consider the present Covid-19 pandemic. Most religious traditions have faced plagues in the past. Their reactions to such events have often included caring for the sick but also looking for the reason why they happened. When the plague is seen as a form of divine punishment, sinners must be identified and penalized. In a world where racial and religious tensions are increasing, scapegoats can be easily found. Already some groups are accused of causing or spreading the virus. Perhaps, hindsight can remind people of the terrible consequences of going down that road.

However, the questions remains, why does God allow something like Covid-19 to occur? I would never presume to understand how God thinks but if one of the results of this pandemic is human suffering and people of faith are called to respond to it with compassionate care, perhaps it may be an opportunity for people to realize how much they have in common. Every individual is vulnerable to things beyond his or her control and cooperative action is likely the only way out of the present situation. This Covid-19 crisis might be God's way of pointing us toward a better way of living together. The event could become a turning point in history, not by establishing a new perfect society, but allowing us to perceive some of the toxic attitudes and behaviours which have infected our world. If foresight is the ability to anticipate and prepare for the future before it happens, perhaps recognizing this possibility might be the best thing to come out of the crisis.

As Jesus indicated in today's Gospel, he wanted his disciples to be forward looking. The past provided the resources from which to learn in hindsight. The present supplied the conditions under which they were challenged to grow. The future offered the reward of an improved world when the experiences of both were used in the right way.