

As a new day dawns, the morning star is rising

Alleluia! The darkness is passing. Alleluia! The pandemic is weakening and quarantine-like directives are slowly being lifted. Like the Israelites of old, on the night of Passover, we too rejoice and celebrate our liberation and the goodness of the living God. Our night is almost over and the day is breaking. Alleluia!

In one of his later letters, St. Peter recounts his experience of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus. On that occasion, he wrote: “We possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pt 1:19).

Called by God

In the Exodus event, God raised up Moses and called him into a powerful service. Moses was a displaced person, having grown up in a land that was not that of his forefathers. He was rejected by the people he knew as family and father. He had a speech impediment, which is a detail often overlooked in the accounts of his life. He was exiled and had to learn desert shepherding. Such shepherding involved an array of skills that were beyond his lived experience and comfort zone as a former nobleman of a great dynasty. And yet, the Lord called him.

In all honesty, Moses was not ready for his mission. He felt overwhelmed, uncertain and unqualified. He was afraid, anxious and wished that things were easier or that someone else could be in charge.

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Like Moses and the leadership of ancient Israel, I suspect many of us feel overrun and underqualified for our current times. Perhaps we are wishing that times could be easier and are wondering, "Why can't life just go back to the way it was?"

But look to Moses, who said "yes" to the Lord God. He took risks. He asked for counsel and was willing to be taught. He trusted that God saw more in him than he was able to see in himself. Moses accepted the mantle of his mission, and he did his best. In this openness, Moses acknowledged that he was unqualified for his call. And by this act of humility, God was able to qualify Moses for his call.

Moses, however, wasn't alone. God quickly told his chosen one to appoint a body of 70 elders to assist in the shepherding of his people. The humility of the elders opened their hearts to seek direction from God and to search for the talents among their own people. The meekness of leadership provided the path for Moses and the elders to collaborate and work together. In this way, we could jokingly say that Moses and the elders of Israel were one of the first "pastoral teams" in salvation history.

Our current challenge

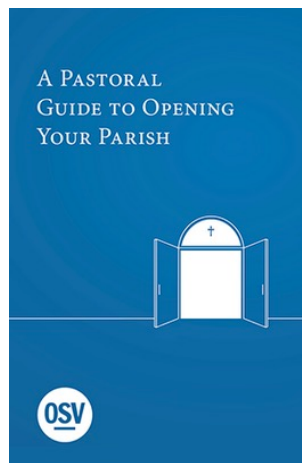
Very few of us may feel we have the professional, or even pastoral, training to handle a pandemic and a concurrent national quarantine. The struggles are unique, and the challenges are immense. And they all happened so quickly! Suspended Masses. Scared parishioners. Lost fellowship. Closed churches. Dispersed communities. Paused ministries amidst severe need. CDC guidelines. Diocesan expectations. Social distancing. Livestreaming. Remote funerals. Technological inadequacies. Lost offertories. Budgetary deficits. Furloughed staff. Uncertain volunteer base.

In surveying the horizon, many pastors and parish leaders have

cried out: “I don’t know what I’m doing! And I don’t know how to lead my parish out of this mess.”

Such words could just as well have been uttered by Moses and the elders of Israel. The secret of the success of Moses and the elders was precisely their faithfulness and confidence in God. The elders made many mistakes. There were poor decisions. They followed wrong directions. But, in the end, they turned to God. He disciplined and guided them. He taught and directed them. And, because of their fidelity, they were successful.

Booklet



This article is included in “A Pastoral Guide to Opening Your Parish,” a new booklet from OSV. As our parishes begin to reopen following local guidelines, the Catholic faithful have many questions and legitimate concerns about what life will look like post-pandemic, and we hope this booklet helps give parish leaders a playbook to welcome back parishioners following the shutdown. For more information, or to order, [click here](#).

In anticipating all the decisions, action plans and directives that we will be expected to make and execute in the coming weeks, we might feel isolated and confused. But there is good news. As the People of God, we are greatly loved and cared for by him. We are members of a divine family called together by the Risen Christ and empowered by the Spirit of the living God. We are not alone. This is God’s work. It has been

entrusted to us as a mission, and he gives us the strength, humility and creativity to be successful and accomplish it well.

We are also members of our own pastoral teams. Whatever the arrangement might be, or the titles, or the leadership model, we are on a team. Moses had 70 elders. We have one another.

Moses and the elders of Israel disclose to us their lasting wisdom. They remind us to rely on God. We cannot neglect prayer. We cannot ignore the thoughts or the opinions of others. We cannot dismiss the talents of those around us. We are called to open our hearts and welcome the direction and discipline of God to guide us. We must be faithful.

By being faithful to God, we are free and able to keep our course, and will be guided not to accidentally worship the contemporary god of "catch up." This new god is deceptive. He calls us to follow him and seek him. He teaches us his litany: "If I just 'catch up' then everything will be OK." He lies to us and promises us consolations that prove to be empty and untrue.

We must keep our focus. Be humble. Trust in God. And do the best we can.

In our hands

Into our hands has been placed the sacred trust of caring for a Christian community. The growth, stability and flourishing of this community is our charge. It's our responsibility.

At the end of his life, St. Peter was still mesmerized by the glory of the Transfiguration. He was a man who had abandoned the Lord Jesus, denounced him three times, misspoke often, exaggerated his own strength and almost denied his call to martyrdom. And yet, he always turned back. He always declared, "I love you, Lord," and he kept fighting and doing his best. The Lord Jesus blessed him, made him our first pope and gave

him the strength to love to the end.

From such a broken, yet redeemed heart, we hear these words: "So I exhort the presbyters (elders) among you. ... Tend the flock of God that is in your midst, [overseeing] not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it. ... And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pt 5:1-4).

With this apostolic push, it's time for us to get started! We need to assess, evaluate, make some decisions, compose action plans and devise directives that will help our parish communities come back together in holy fellowship, recover our financial resources so that we can do God's work, reach out pastorally and serve those in need, and look creatively at our technological outreach for greater evangelization.

The work is daunting. The task is immense. But God is with us, and we are with one another.

We are ready. Let's get started!

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