Meet Me in the Upper Room

by Stephen Eberle

Over the past several weeks, my thoughts have returned over and over again to the early disciples waiting in the Upper Room. After Jesus' death, his followers essentially sheltered in place. Even after learning and experiencing the good news of his resurrection, they still found themselves questioning what comes next, wondering when it would be safe to leave, and hoping for a sign that their story wasn't over.

Stories from the Upper Room have always resonated with me. In some ways, the Upper Room is a kind of threshold—an in-between space in the Christian Scriptures that is neither part of Jesus' public ministry in the Gospels, nor the thriving and adventurous early Christian community depicted in most of the Acts of the Apostles. No, the Upper Room is a space in between; it's a space of desolation and consolation all rolled into one. It's a space that follows a shocking turn of events and precedes the end of our fears. Throughout my life, I've found myself in that middle space a number of times; I've learned how to stay in that space and I hope to offer some perspective on the Upper Room in which we now collectively find ourselves.

Both of my parents died from cancer, seven years apart from one another. My mom died in 2007 when I was just twenty-eight years old. She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer after a routine outpatient procedure went terribly wrong, and the until-then undiscovered cancer washed through her abdominal cavity, leaving her with just seventy-three days to live. My dad battled bladder cancer for about five years, enjoying a rich quality of life until one day the cancer spread to his liver and he chose to enter home-hospice, remaining comfortable and surrounded by loved ones until his death about ten weeks later.

For me, that time between diagnosis and death for both of my parents felt like a kind of threshold between spaces. Priorities shifted, obligations changed, and I found myself retreating from public and social life to attend to my most immediate community my family. Even though I knew how each of their diagnoses would end, I found myself asking again and again "What's going to happen??" The early disciples also retreated to support one another after shocking and traumatic events. They also had a fishing-boatload of questions just like me. And here amid this pandemic, I'm sure you also wonder what comes next and how this will end.

I don't know the answers to any of these questions, but my experience accompanying my parents through illness and hospice has taught me some things about that in-between space that could be helpful.

—continued on next page
First, take care of yourself. It’s easy to lose ourselves in the inertia of in-between. It may feel like since we’re neither here nor there, what’s the point of maintaining our routines? During my mom’s brief but intense illness, I lost myself. I abandoned all the things that kept me grounded—friends, exercise, prayer—and immersed myself in desolation. I couldn’t bear to stay in the threshold. But during my dad’s illness, I prioritized my self-care. I paid attention to my physical and emotional well-being while acknowledging things were different. Our bodies and our hearts are gifts from God and caring for them is good stewardship of those gifts.

Second, stay in the present. "If we only knew then what we know now... What will it be like when this is over?" These thoughts, while useful in certain contexts, can be dangerous when they invade our every waking moment. Jesus knew something about mindfulness and the uselessness of worrying. "Do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Mt 6:34). Staying present to the moment also helps us discern what God wants us to know now. St. Ignatius’ daily Examen is a helpful tool for detecting God’s presence, and The Serenity Prayer is a simple reminder of what we can and cannot control (see below).

I know we all want to leave the Upper Room and get on with our Pentecost lives. But we may be here for a while, and I hope these two tips make life in the Upper Room a little more bearable.

I imagine that, just like me, this isn’t your first time standing in the threshold between two rooms. Where do you feel God’s presence now? Where do you have trouble sensing it? What relationships bring you life? What nourishment does your body need to sustain life? Mindfully and gently, meet me in the Upper Room; we’ll get through this together.

Steve Eberle is the Associate Vice President for Advancement with the Ignatian Volunteer Corps. He received his MA in Pastoral and Spiritual Care at Loyola University Maryland.

The Serenity Prayer
The Serenity Prayer was written by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and has been shared widely by twelve-step groups. According to Wikipedia, the prayer is commonly quoted as:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.

The Ignatian Examen
The Office of Ignatian Spirituality offers a weekly online Examen on Fridays at 4:00 PM (Eastern). Visit http://jesuitseastois.org/examenlive for more information and to connect to the weekly Examen.

Images: Front page, The Upper Room, provided by author.
In your prayers, please remember our sick and homebound brothers and sisters, our ministry at Pennsylvania Hospital and all those who have asked for our prayers.


Announcements

Electronic Giving: Update by May 15!

We have upgraded our electronic giving program so that now you can contribute both from your computer and by using your cell phone, whether or not you register as a parishioner. Our new program is called ParishSOFT Giving. Visit the Make A Donation page of our website oldstjoseph.org for detailed instructions on starting out with or upgrading to ParishSOFT Giving. Please note: everyone who now uses Online Giving will need to upgrade to ParishSOFT Giving and close their old account by May 15. Thank you!

Laudato Sí/Week

It is the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis’s encyclical letter on care of our common home, Laudato Si. Pope Francis has invited the global church to mark the occasion with a week of prayer, study and action—see laudatosi.org for more information. Other resources for prayer and study are available from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops at http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/index.cfm and from The Catholic Climate Covenant (catholicclimatecovenant.org) and its Catholic Climate Project (catholicclimateproject.org).

Vote by Mail

Catholics approach voting as a civic and moral responsibility. Prepare for the Pennsylvania’s June 2 primary election today by signing up to vote safely by mail. Visit www.votespa.com for directions on registering to vote and on requesting a mail ballot. If you do not have access to the internet, you can also get a paper application to vote by mail by calling the PA Department of State at 1-877-868-3772.

Catholic Ethics and COVID-19

The Catholic Health Association of the United States is offering a complementary webinar series on Catholic Ethics and the Challenge of COVID-19, in cooperation with Georgetown University and its Pellegrino Center for Clinical Bioethics. Three more sessions are scheduled through the end of May; recordings of previous webinars are also available. For more information, visit https://www.chausa.org/events/calendar-of-events/ethics-webinar-series/overview
Remembering Fr. Edward Dougherty, SJ, beloved teacher and minister who spent a decade in Africa

Rev. Edward C. Dougherty, SJ, was born in Philadelphia, Pa. on February 28, 1941. He graduated from St. Joseph’s Prep and entered the Novitiate of St. Isaac Jogues in Wernersville, Pa. in 1959. He earned both his bachelor’s and master’s in the Classics from Loyola Seminary in Shrub Oak, NY, a Master of Divinity from Woodstock College in Maryland and a Master of Theological Studies from Woodstock College in New York. He was ordained a priest on June 3, 1972.

Following ordination, Fr. Dougherty taught religion and Latin for six years at Georgetown Prep near Washington, D.C. Then, following several years in special studies, he taught Theology for a year at St. Joseph’s University before becoming socius to the master of novices at the Novitiate of St. Isaac Jogues in Wernersville, where he remained for four years.

In 1990, Fr. Dougherty moved to the Manresa on Severn retreat house in Annapolis where he directed retreats for three years. He then took an assignment overseas that would last for eleven years, teaching sacred scripture at the St. Joseph’s Theological Institute in Merrivale, South Africa. His students came from many African countries, as well as from all over the world.

After a much-deserved sabbatical, Fr. Dougherty embarked on what would fortuitously be two seven-year assignments at two Jesuit parishes whose histories date back to the 17th and 18th centuries. He first became parochial vicar at St. Ignatius Church in Port Tobacco, Md., the oldest Catholic Parish in continuous service in the United States. He served parishioners there, as well as his brother Jesuits as superior of the community in Southern Maryland. In 2013, he moved back to Philadelphia to serve as a priest at Old St. Joseph’s Church, the city’s oldest Catholic Church.

Early in 2020, Fr. Dougherty retired from active ministry and moved to the Jesuit community at Saint Joseph’s University. He died on April 28, 2020 at the age of 79.
INFORMATION

Pastor
Fr. Walter Modrys SJ (pastor@oldstjoseph.org)

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Deborah Hluchan (faithandfriends@oldstjoseph.org)

Director of Hospital Ministry
Tom Volkert (hospitalEM@oldstjoseph.org)

Rectory Office Hours
Monday through Friday: 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM
Sunday: 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM

Mass Times
Monday through Saturday: 12:05 PM
Saturday Vigil Mass for Sunday: 5:30 PM
Sunday: 7:30, 9:30, 11:30 AM and 6:30 PM
Holy Days: 12:05 and 7:00 PM

Medical Emergency
In a medical emergency when the need for a priest is urgent, please call the rectory.

Hearing Enhancements
Old St. Joseph’s is equipped with an audio hearing loop. Switch on the T-coil function of your device to use the loop. Booklets with the Sunday readings are available in the rear of the church.

Registration
Registration forms are available in the rectory office during normal office hours, on the bookcases in the back of the church and online at www.oldstjoseph.org. They can be returned to the parish office by mail or in person.

Sacrament of Reconciliation
A priest is available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation Monday through Saturday from 11:30 AM–12:00 PM or by appointment.

Sacrament of Baptism
If you want to arrange a baptism, please contact Fr. Hannafey (fhannafey@oldstjoseph.org) at least two months before the desired date.

Eucharist for the Homebound
To arrange to receive Communion at home, please contact the parish offices.

The Sacrament of Anointing
The Sacrament of Anointing (the sacrament of the sick) is offered during the 12:05 PM Mass on the first Saturday of each month. Homebound or hospitalized persons wanting to receive the Sacrament of Anointing should call the parish office.

Sacrament of Matrimony
If you want to be married at Old St. Joseph’s, please visit our website, oldstjoseph.org and read the material under the heading Weddings. Please call the parish office at 215-923-1766 at least nine months before your desired wedding date.

Rite of Christian Initiation
If you are an adult wishing to be baptized, or to receive First Eucharist and Confirmation, or are a baptized non-Catholic seeking full communion with Catholic Church, please call the parish office or email rcia@oldstjoseph.org.

Mass of Christian Burial
To schedule a funeral or memorial Mass, ask your funeral director to call the parish office.

Parish Pastoral Council
(osjpc@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Finance Council
Paul Shay, chair

Historic Preservation Corporation Board
Fr. Walter Modrys SJ, president

Adult Education
Rita O’Brien and Jeanmarie Zippo
(adulted@oldstjoseph.org)

Eldership
Pat Nelson (eldership@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Life
Joe Casey (parishlife@oldstjoseph.org)

Ignatian Spirituality and Formation
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Women, Faith and Fellowship
Rana McNamara (wff@oldstjoseph.org)

Young Adult Community
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Altar Servers
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Homebound Ministry
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Lou Anne Bulik (lectors@oldstjoseph.org)

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