



Dear Friends,

The picture above is the *corona*, in a total eclipse of the sun.

"Corona" of course means "crown," hence the ceremony called "coronation." And "corona" means, by extension, a halo of light. But I have been struck especially by the specific meaning in astronomy-- the corona is the halo of light visible around the edge of the black disk of the moon where the sun should be, in a total eclipse. It is a remarkable fact that the moon, when it comes between us and the sun, looks from our vantage point to be exactly the same size as the sun, so the circle is blotted out entirely with black. Deep black, the absence of light. What we are seeing as the corona are the flares of the sun, the points of flame which shoot out all around the circle of the sun, when the sun is no longer visible.

But-- think about it-- those flares (without a telescope) are *only* visible during a total eclipse. Ordinarily, when we look up to the sun, all we can see is, "Wow, that's bright!" The corona, in other words, is always there, the halo of light around the sun is *always* there. But it can only be seen when the sun is totally eclipsed. Here is an exact analogy: the stars are always shining, but we can only see them when the sun is hidden, we can only see those sources of *light* when the sky is *dark*.

We are in dark times. The elaborate metaphor above is not meant to obscure that. In addition to the disease and death spread by the coronavirus, we see revealed more than ever the injustices wreaked by the structures of our world, and those are likely to be increased by the pandemic. Permanently, if we are not careful.

But there are opportunities too, and some of those are made made visible only by contrast with the dark circle at the center. In a conversation this week with Beth Mount and Jim Ross and our Pathways to Friendship teaching group in Massachusetts, we explored this metaphor and then began to elaborate some responses to the question, "*What has become visible?*" What flares of light, perhaps there all along, are now more visible, that might be extended and reproduced?

You have thought about this too, I'll bet. Lots of positive things seem to be increasing, like home gardening, and buying from local farms. Within our service system, some non-profit

providers of group homes moved three months ago away from eight-hour shifts and invited some staff to move in. Less coming-and-going was meant to reduce the probability of contagion, but we found that it also enhanced continuity and enhanced the feeling of home, for residents and for staff. People have noticed that, for most people we serve, feeling trapped indoors, board games are more engaging than television, and a walk outside is more exciting than looking at a screen. In many places, people are trying to re-think what people with disabilities who have no paying job might do all day. You have a dozen of your own examples!

Any opportunity for us to increase the recognition that "we're all in this together," and not just in our service settings, that is all to the good. Beth pointed out how many neighborhoods and communities and individuals and families are right now engaged in voluntary mutual aid, more than before the pandemic. Another flare, to be nurtured and imitated. And this is a flare that typically is not part of any service system, but instead has been **informally organized**, by people and groups who had no such mandate, but who saw what needed doing. Free will offerings of goods and especially of time. We are thus seeing an opportunity for the rejuvenation of what had long been traditional in neighborhoods and communities. Hopeful signs! And you know more of these, too.

Will this coronavirus era bring more division, or more cooperation? Will it bring more triumph of the kingdom of Death, or of the kingdom of Life? Too soon to tell. But such predictions actually have no bearing on what each of us might do to **encourage** one direction over the other, to encourage us to choose Life, as we are commanded.

One of these hopeful flares in this corona, as many writers have commented, is that we are being reminded to reflect on what is **essential**. Many of us have been reminded that grocery workers, health care workers (and not just the doctors and the nurses), postal workers, delivery workers, teachers, cleaning workers, and so many other formerly invisible workers, are essential. And we in human service know that includes the group home staff and other workers in the lives of people with disabilities. Essential, indispensable. Of course they always were, but to most people that reality is only now visible.

An essay this week by Father Jacques Turck focused on what is essential, when he wrote that there are "three foundational principles: everything is connected, everything is a **gift**, everything is ephemeral. What we have gone through is an opportunity to focus on the essential-- the essential, which is to put the human person back in first place in all our concerns." Reflect, focus, discern what is essential.

Pope Francis wrote last week, "Worshipping is stripping ourselves of our idols, even the most hidden ones." What have we worshipped in our lives, in our unconscious behavior, that is, upon reflection, inessential? What, in our service system, in our mutual aid, in our own lives, can we now see is **incidental**, not essential? What may even be distracting, what may act as if it were a false god? And with what might it be replaced? What have these past three months revealed to us? **What has become visible?**

Peace and blessings,