

We have been here before.

Bishop Robert Barron, in his *Letter to a Suffering Church: A Bishop Speaks on the Sexual Abuse Crisis*, has a section entitled, “We Have Been Here Before.” Bishop Barron, beginning over a millennium ago, recounts the history of popes and priests not living up to the Gospel. He does this as a way of allowing us to see that we can have hope. We have faced difficulties before...even as bad as or worse than what we see now.

As I sit at my computer in an undisclosed location (although it’s either the Office or the Rectory; I’m really not going anywhere) I keep thinking about that section title. This whole virus situation rings a bell. In his souvenir book of the Silver Jubilee of St. Joseph’s Parish, written in 1927, Monsignor George P. Aberle gives some first-hand information about the influenza epidemic of 1918. He doesn’t use the words *social distancing* or *social isolation*, but he does describe some of the measures that the Queen City took to stop the spread of the epidemic:

All public places, as schools, churches, etc. were closed here for a time, as in many other places.

During the fall of this year [1918] the school work had to be discontinued for the interval of one month, on account of the never to be forgotten dreadful disease (flue) [sic] or the Spanish Influenza, which prevailed throughout the United States and in many European countries as well.

When people were diagnosed with the flu, they were quarantined, what we call social isolation. Someone pointed out that the word quarantine comes from the Latin for “forty”, *quadraginta*. Since I’m in the idiom, the Latin word for Lent is *Quadregesima*. (*Cuaresma*, in Spanish). Now, I am not attempting to prophesy or contradict any advice you may have received. Rather, I want to make the connection between Lent and what we may be feeling in social distancing.

A couple of weeks ago, I quoted Simone Weil who said, “The genius of Christianity is not that it has found a supernatural cure for suffering, but that it has found a supernatural use for it.” In this suffering we are undergoing now, whether it’s the deprivation of company, of Holy Communion, or of health, we are not alone and we will bear fruit as we unite our suffering with the suffering of our Lord. Offer it up; He can do something with it. But if we try to hang onto it, we will lose.

We have been in Lent before, and until the Day of Judgment, we will be in Lent again. Lent is always a preparation for the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord. This is played out not only in Easter Glory for us (although that would be its finality), but also the mortification, purification, and sanctification of His Passion and Death in us. We have been here before, but we are not lost.