

A Very Brief Article on Cats and Covid 19

I decided upon this article a few months shortly after the Covid 19 virus (aka Corona virus) began to affect virtually every nation on the planet. That was when the news coverage started to shift to a 7/24 operation and hasn't ceased even in the slightest. Obviously big news, but as everyone knows, just as bad and perhaps worse in the long run are the economic ramifications. To top it off, some are warning about a resurgence of the virus in the fall. Since the news coverage is literally inescapable, fatigue sets in quickly which means you have to know when to back off. It's guaranteed to drive you crazy, literally. Abstaining from this coverage except for the basics is an approach many people have learned, often the hard way. So what if you miss a few days' coverage? The same ol' same ol'. Nevertheless I perceived an opportunity to see a few interesting trends emerging that could change society as a whole. While some are bantering this about, in reality it's still too early.

At the time of this writing societies all around the world have changed and continue to change in unprecedented ways. Chief among them is doing things remotely such as education and work. The verdict, of course, is still out for the long run because we found ourselves in this situation almost overnight. The most unexpected change (and one for the better) is the decrease of pollution. Simply amazing in how short a time the planet has recuperated although the threat of returning to things-as-they-were remains.

On a more fundamental level, behind the headlines is a rediscovery of things spiritual. This covers a very wide gamut and is a direct result with the closure of places of worship. In their place are virtual services and a plethora of online groups, the merit of which continues to be debated. At least it's better than nothing. Some fear that once the epidemic has crested, people won't return to traditional modes of worship, but as for now, we can let that go.

Keeping in line with the religious angle, even early on when the virus was starting to make serious inroads, the atmosphere you felt when stepping outdoors was not unlike Holy Saturday. Actually the outbreak coincided pretty much with Lent. During those days and even to the present a pervasive silence started to fill the air regardless of whether in the city or outside it. Even the woods had a different type of silence as if free from human interference. Stillness may be more a better way of putting it, for it's the result when so much frantic activity comes to a grinding halt. So with the convergence of Lent and the overall atmosphere produced by the virus outbreak, Holy Saturday was the obvious candidate to express this along with a sense of expectation. Here and there you'll pick up talk about "last days" but surprisingly it hasn't evolved that way. However, that may change. As for now, the stillness reflects that everyone and everything are holding their breath as they're quarantined at home knowing they'll be released but ignorant as to when. Obviously the unknown is what we find unnerving.

So how do you comport yourself when thrown into such an unprecedented situation almost overnight? That's a question most of the world is asking right now or more specifically, after

a number of weeks or so of relative isolation either imposed voluntarily or from without. It might be something novel at first but by now that has worn off, and people are starting to get restless which could lead to trouble on a larger scale. Dealing with family members, especially children, is more challenging. However, it's easier if you're on your own though that can be just as tough since most of us haven't been schooled to comport ourselves as to being alone. Some folks I know have turned to reading about prisoners who've endured lengthy terms, including those who have experienced solitary confinement for political or religious reasons. In other words, those cases basically are about persecution and real deprivation.

Given the various approaches one may adopt, the religious one seems to hold the most promise. But first a cautionary note. Something similar to what we have now happened after 9-11. However, not long afterwards things went back to business as usual. Yet this seems it might have a more long term impact since it's so widespread and not the result of human intervention. Various religions have precedents for living apart, holy men and women who forsook society to live by themselves. Then there are others who may not have done this explicitly but in essence are of such an ilk. In order to adapt to being alone—and this can be in an apartment, the suburbs or countryside—you have to come to grips with yourself fast...really fast. While it's easier to do this in the countryside, surprisingly an apartment in the city comes in second. There's something secure about being surrounded by other people even if you're alone. The infamous loneliness of big city living remains but somehow has or is being transformed. As for the suburbs, forget-about-it. There's something bland and mundane about that environment. Wish-washy is not far off the mark. Somehow the real struggle with solitude takes place there because unlike the city or countryside, you have to get into your car to get the basic necessities.

The quarantine experience forces you to get down to business right away. Before you can do that effectively, setting up some kind of daily schedule is essential. On top of the list is resolving to limit yourself to media in all forms, for news outlets take special pleasure in exciting us and thus making us addictive to them. As for starting out, you can wing it harmlessly for a few days, but that won't do it because almost at once you're hit with a spirit of lassitude that can knock you for a loop. Actually lassitude is a great word. Instinctively you know what it means without having to look it up and fits the spirit of so many people right now. A word concomitant with it is malaise. We all know what it means pertaining to not just a physical illness but one that's all pervasive by reason of the discomfort it suggests. Both lassitude and malaise are as pervasive yet as invisible as the Covid 19 virus and loves to spread everywhere.

Once you've settled on a schedule and have decided to adhere to it, the next step is to come up with an appropriate image of what you're doing. One that comes to mind is to consider your environment not unlike a cloister. At the center of most religious cloisters you'll find a garden, often with a fountain or two. That's the heart of the place around which everything else revolves literally speaking as you frequent the buildings which surround it even though

you might not see the cloister's center in and by itself. You can't but help notice that even if the cloister is shaped as a square or rectangle, always you're walking around it. The center is tugging at you whether you're aware of it or not, for here is where you belong despite any distractions.

The relentless pull which this cloister exerts is of special importance. The center like the spoke of a wheel keeps you grounded. By no means does it have to be on a grand scale, for it's possible to construct one spiritually in a small-ish apartment in downtown Chicago or the like. In such a case the center is more invisible and partakes of a transcendent reality, this being represented by some kind of religious symbol or several of them. That's another thing you hear about as people adapt their living space into a holy space or setting aside even a corner for it. Usually such "chapels" are off to the side physically speaking but spiritually they are the center of one's living space.

Once you have your cloister set up and schedule mapped out to conform to it, time to put into practice. After a while—actually in most cases a fairly short while—you get bored and wonder if all this which sounded nice at the beginning can be sustained. You're faced with a seemingly endless amount of time, each day indistinguishable from the other. This is where you can run into serious trouble, and reports of this are starting to trickle in from the general quarantined public. Time starts bearing down like a huge inexorable weight. As for the space or cloister you've established, that is more or less secondary to this weight of time. However, it's isn't long before space assumes a special burdensome-ness of its own. This turns out to be an enormous challenge where the above mentioned lassitude and malaise thrive like the virus we're dealing with right now.

While all this is pretty much standard information and practice for living alone over a protracted period of time, still it sounds somewhat abstract. What we want is something we can start doing today. Knowing people who've been at it a long time is a great help though we may not have that privilege, at least starting out. However, if you're serious about making a go at making the most of this quarantine, chances are someone somewhere will pop into your life automatically. So while waiting for that to happen, you can get inspiration from plenty of sites online. Now that we're a few months into this pandemic, two discreet images have caught my attention which are worthy of appreciation. More accurately, I mean one image with a kind of sub-image.

The primary image is not so much of home but "being at home," making the noun into a verb which suggests a domestic type of activity usually quite boring to the naked eye. It's more a refinement of that cloister noted above, more personal by nature. We could say that the pandemic has made us...almost the entire world...focus in on that as never before. Actually it hearkens back to the pre-Industrial Revolution era when people worked at home. More precisely, that was how people lived until so recently. Then there was no distinction between being at home and being at work. Same with vacations, for there was no reason to leave one's work to go elsewhere. Already you were at where you were just as your ancestors

had been. I know of one such local case, a farm that has been in the same family and same location since King Philip's War, well before the Revolutionary War. For them time is telescoped; same with the land. Interestingly they consider such events so distant from us as having taken place a few weeks ago, some of it literally on their very land. Ask if they've taken a vacation, and you get a blank stare, almost as though they wanted you to define that term. While busy...busier than many of us can imagine...they don't project this simply because they are at home with their fore-bearers watching over them.

In such an environment so rare today animals play a large role. In addition to dairy cattle, sheep and a few horses, there are the requisite cats and dogs living here and there. Clearly it's a perfect picture of domesticity but another thing doing it. To sustain this requires back-breaking work 7-24. The presence of such animals contributes to viewing time and space differently because they have needs that must be catered to on a daily basis. Abstracting from this, those now quarantined don't have such companions which keep a schedule different from their own. If you hang out with such people who live close to the earth, their relationship with animals while ultimately utilitarian, is in actuality no such. Chances are most of these animals have a lineage just as long as their masters. In other words, such a relationship can't be described adequately but must be seen.

Even though 99.99% of use don't follow such a lifestyle, nevertheless in our new situation we can find inspiration by such a way of life. We can do this by projecting our imagination and creating a world—not one alien from what we're in (same with an idealistic image)--but one with which we can work. Since the onset of the current virus, a number of cozy or homey pictures (photos, sketches and the like) have emerged chiefly as a way of making the quarantine more acceptable. Keep in mind that this is a unique situation for most people. It's amazing how well they've done under the circumstances, a testimony to the human spirit. As for these images, somewhere in the corner, even on one's lap or nearby you'll find a discreet image of a cat usually sleeping, content without a worry in the world. Note that this is during the day. Night is another story, the natural environment for a cat. You'll find dogs here and there but mostly cats. They're more indoor animals which can make the most of a confined situation. Besides, they're fond of sleeping most of the time. Dogs are for the outdoors and can't handle confinement. Also they're not as cuddly when curled up or sleeping.

So as we sit there in our confinement and are lucky enough to have a feline friend but never paid that much attention before this. Now is the perfect time or even better, imitate them not so much as we humans trying to behave like cats but to re-create in our own way their contentedness. This might be idealizing it too much, for supposedly cats are neurotic. Scientifically that may be true, but what's in it for us? Besides, their cuddliness evaporates when they go on the hunt, becoming perfect killing machines. Fortunately we're much bigger so this poses no problem. Still we can focus in on how a cat is content to be in it's own little world basically for life whereas we are not. In other words, we're more like dogs.

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