When the children of Israel were set free from their slavery in Egypt, they were initially filled with joy. As they traveled on foot with no end in sight, their patience soon wore thin and they complained. “Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water?”

Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India announced a complete lockdown of the country for 21 days. Daily wage workers found themselves without employment and began to walk home even though the journey would be long and require days if not weeks. Streets have been clogged with people walking to reach their villages in neighboring states. Some states have tried to send busses to help, others have recommended staying in place. Sadly, some police tactics have been draconian, and people have been beaten. The lockdown meant to protect life has led to anarchy. One can easily imagine the words of the Israelites being changed to the situation at hand. “Why have you told us to leave Delhi, with all of the chaos at hand we will die before we can go home. There are no jobs and we can’t afford to stay without food, water and shelter?”

And the situation in Delhi, is echoed in many other places as countless governments have yet to marshal adequate resources to respond to the pandemic. Our own situation here in Alaska is less extreme. Air travel is down by 90% with many flights being canceled and many communities closing their borders. School is closed until May 1st. Churches and many businesses have closed their doors in an effort to limit the spread of the virus. And we too grumble for the things we took for granted. The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the shortfall of every culture around the globe. It is truly of biblical proportions.

With biblical proportions, we are all praying for a biblical solution. In the Book of Numbers (21:4-9), the grumbling of the Israelites unleashed the seraph serpents. Many were bitten and died. The people acknowledged their sins and asked Moses for help. Moses prayed for the people and listened to God who told him how to fashion a remedy that cured people of the venomous snake poison.

Pope Francis is our modern-day equivalent of Moses. Last week, he urged Catholics to pray the rosary together. Then he urged all Christians to pray the Our Father together. Finally, on Friday, he offered a message of hope for the entire world.

We are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying “We are perishing” (Mark 4:38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.

Each person needs to take stock of their own situation and ask what sacrifice can I make? How can I work for the common good? What grumbling am I guilty of? Americans are very individualistic by nature. We are best however, when we work for the good of others with a unified goal and purpose.

Doctors and nurses are fighting the virus on the front lines. They are not thinking of themselves but of others. Liquor distilleries are now making hand sanitizer. Car companies are making ventilators. Many people are reaching out to their neighbors and offering help.

We are not as self-sufficient as we would like to think. We truly need God at the center of our lives. As Pope Francis has reminded us, “Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with Jesus on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God’s strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.”