Peter had cured a crippled man and then boldly proclaimed to all nearby witnesses that Jesus had risen from the dead. He asked the crowd to repent and believe and thousands responded. A cynic would remind us that no good deed goes unpunished. Peter and John were held in custody overnight, and then brought before the Jewish hierarchy the next day. Peter again, takes the opportunity to boldly proclaim the good news.

All the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.’ There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved” (Acts 4:10-12). Peter knows that in the Roman world of that era, salvation was often attributed to the emperor who was hailed as “savior” and “god.” Peter demonstrates his newfound courage in denying that salvation comes from the emperor. Jesus, the Son of God, is the only savior.

Hoping to make the best of an impossible situation, the leaders gave Peter and John a stern warning to never again speak to anyone in his name. Peter and John stand together explaining that they would rather obey God than man. “It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard” (4:20).

Jesus taught, “Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:15-16). The lesson that Peter and John learned following the Beatitudes is put into play here in the Acts of the Apostles.

Amidst the pandemic restrictions in place for the safety and health of everyone, have we been asked to put our lamp under a bushel basket. The answer is no. Government has a legitimate responsibility to keep people safe. Whether it is the federal, state, or tribal authorities, all have recognized the need to look out for the common good. Giving up our liberties is a great sacrifice done with the wisdom that it will save lives and that it is for the common good.

100 years ago, there was a pandemic from the Spanish Flu. In order to preserve life and allow for future worship, the Bishop of Baltimore at the time, Cardinal Gibbons closed the churches for 2 months. We all have an obligation to protect life. The same principles hold today. The Archbishop of Lori, the current archbishop of Baltimore and a leading voice on religious liberty, explains the COVID-19 lockdown is not a threat to religious liberty:

“The Lord is still with us in our sufferings today and the Lord is able in these difficult times to pull good out of evil and to pull blessings out of our sufferings and to pull life out of death … We need to keep our eyes fixed on Christ crucified and risen. There is no cross that we bear today that the Lord has not already borne for us and for our salvation.”

God continues to reach out to us, even when the practice of our faith is much more private. We all hunger to be reunited. It is difficult to fast especially during the Easter season when we feel such a “deep spiritual hunger and even an anguish until we are able to once again congregate in our churches and celebrate the Mass, [and] the sacraments.”

On the cross, Jesus sacrificed his life that we might have eternal life. In our social distancing, we too are asked to sacrifice. Let us unite our own suffering with that of the crucified Christ that good may come out of this great sacrifice. “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied” (Mt 5:6).