Nearly 3 million infections worldwide, 200,000 deaths. And this is only what we know from reported cases of the coronavirus. The numbers defy belief. Everything in our lives has been impacted. Will things ever be the same?

Let us go back in time 2000 years ago. It is the first day of the week. The death of Jesus is still raw. How could the Son of David, the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world be so misunderstood, that He would be falsely condemned and brutally executed? The situation defies belief. Everything in our lives has been impacted. Will things ever be the same? Cleopas and his companion were downcast at the death of Jesus Christ. They were unable to recognize him in their presence as they walked the 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

Death is always hard to deal whether we are dealing with 200,000 or just 1. Whether death comes from the corona virus, or cancer, or organ failure, or a miscarriage, or a tragic accident, or a violent death or the body simply wears out due to old age. We are downcast. We are grief stricken. Everything in our lives has been impacted. Will things ever be the same?

When my father died 7 years ago due to cancer, it was hard for me to accept. Intellectually, one understands that death is a passing from this life to the next. With hope and trust we believe in the resurrection. But in the gut, there is sorrow, and anger, and hurt, and a questioning of God? What happened? Didn’t I urge you for him, to “Stay with us, a little longer”?

It took a long time before my eyes were opened and I understood? Let me explain as we go back to the Gospel and to the words of Jesus. “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25-26)

From long before we can even imagine, God had a plan for the salvation of humanity. The plan unfolded over thousands of years. Jesus helps Cleopas and his companion to understand, “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures” (24: 27). The explanation takes a little while to sink in, but after he is gone, Cleopas and the other disciple recognize their hearts were burning while he spoke on the way and opened up the Scriptures. In death, the disciples know Jesus more fully then when he was alive. With the help of Jesus, they see the big picture of salvation history. Jesus suffered and died that we may all be saved. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. (1 Jn 9-11)

A turning point for me in understanding my father’s own death happened two summers ago after my father had been dead 5 years. It took 5 months to go through his poems and letters to reconstruct the Gospel of his life from the lessons he had taught me over a lifetime. My father was a prolific letter writer and a caring soul who turned to God in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. In the joyful and sorrowful moments of his own life and in the heartwarming and painful moments of other’s lives, he prayed with a pen in his hand. And God provided insight, and wisdom, and a spirit of truth enabling my father to reach out and help others understand life. Through the gift from God that he shared freely with others, through the daily sacrifice of letters written over a lifetime, I came to understand how deeply God sewed love in his heart, mind and soul.

I was not able to recognize this as it was happening. I was like Cleopas and the other disciple unable to recognize Jesus in their presence as they walked the 7 miles from Jerusalem to
Emmaus. Were my father still alive today, I do not believe I would know him as well as I do in death. Now I can look at a letter or a poem and see what was invisible to me at the time. And when I do, my heart burns with an understanding that previously did not exist.

As I was reading his poetry and letters and putting together the Gospel of my father’s life, I felt closer to him than I ever had before. It was as if he were looking silently over my shoulder and helping me to put the mosaic of his life into a beautiful portrait. The same God that had inspired him in life, was helping the both of us to be closer in death than in life. Jesus “was made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35). My father was made known to me in the breaking open of his words.

From time to time, I share a poem of my father’s in the context of a homily. I am always amazed although decades separate the time I am working on a homily in the present, from the time he wrote in the past, there is an uncanny resemblance between the two. It really shouldn’t surprise me, the same source of wisdom, the same God has inspired both of us to see a small glimpse into the way, the life and the truth. And once the homily and poem are laid side by side, it is as if both of us were together on the road to Emmaus with Jesus. “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures” (24:27).

They say that when an elder dies, it is as if a library burns. The wisdom of a lifetime is gone. But if the source of that wisdom is indeed the source of all wisdom, then the library has not burned, it has been relocated to heaven. The library is accessible by memory as we recall the stories from a person’s life. It is still accessible in prayer. It is accessible in the breaking of bread when we gather with the Angels and Saints to celebrate the Eucharist.

Alleluia, Alleluia! Lord Jesus, as we mourn the loss of a loved one, open the Scriptures to us; make our hearts burn while you speak to us. Alleluia, Alleluia!

Let me share with you two poems from my father.

- What Letters Convey – I encourage you to take a little time and prayer to put your own thoughts on paper and write to a loved one.
- Take Time for Praise
WHAT LETTERS CONVEY

E. M. Fozzi

With every letter I intend, to reach the heart of a caring friend, to fill your life in certain ways, with words of hope and faith and praise.

And to you, may each letter bring, the melody of the birds that sing; and the very freshness of new-cut flowers, to help you enjoy your leisure hours.

For what are letters, but rays of hope, to help a friend to daily hope; and bring some sunshine into your life, amid the toils of earthly strife!

Each letter contains a special theme, that hope is eternal when you can dream of happy times, which play a part to cast away worries from mind and heart.

My letters express that I do care to wish you well with every prayer, to let you know to let you see, that you mean so very much to me.

With every letter and between each line, may it convey this special sign: so, at letter’s end, you can’t deny that God loves you and so do I!
Take Time for Praise

As you count your blessings one by one,  
Remember always what the Lord has done.  
He holds your heart in the palm of his hands ...  
He shares your dreams, your hopes, your plans.

His peace is as gentle as a dove ...  
He's given you his protective love.  
No greater love could your heart share ...  
Then the fruits of his eternal care.

Life is mystic – but there's no haze  
When you realize every moment is ripe for praise.  
So be ever grateful in a hundred ways,  
Not just on Thanksgiving, but for all of your days.

We miss so much when we run a hectic race  
Remember to slow down to the Lord's pace.  
He's there in triumphs or to share your sorrows,  
To walk beside you for all your tomorrows.

The Lord will go to any length  
To renew your hopes – to give you strength.  
He's present in the moment and as each year unfolds,  
So thank him for the past, the present, and whatever the future holds.

"Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."
The Lord mourns the thankful are so few.  
Make time for the Lord – make time for praise.  
He has so much more in store at the end of your days.