

REFLECTION

By **Mike McCormick**, St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families, former Augustinian Volunteer

LENT 2021

Fourth Sunday

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16)

I'm always skeptical when I hear others describe instances of suffering as "blessings in disguise." Can you imagine breaking your arm and having a friend say, "That's a blessing in disguise!" — while you're still sitting in the ER? Sure, they might be right eventually; but in that moment you would be in too much pain for their words to be helpful. You might even consider deleting that friend's phone number.

The events of the last year have made it even harder to recognize such hidden blessings. Amidst universal confusion, we are thirsting for straightforwardness. Maybe that's why today's Gospel reading is hitting me differently.

In this passage, we receive a clear and radiant report of Jesus' person and ministry: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

In these words, we find Jesus directly offering Himself and extending His invitation to each one of us: believe and trust me. He is unmasked, undisguised. Now, will Jesus' straightforwardness give me the courage this Lent to step out from behind my own disguises?

FOCUS: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Today's Gospel suggests that darkness is part of the human experience. When I reflect on the world, the United States, and even my city of Washington, D.C., there is surely darkness preventing us from achieving equality and equity for all. This darkness is within me too, in the moments when I doubt change is possible.

God acknowledges this darkness by sending his light and messengers into the world. Their examples help guide us and strengthen us. Is there a particular messenger who inspires your own prayers and actions this Lent?

PRAYER

God, thank you for this life and journey. Please help me along the way. When the world seems dark, please help me remember the hope and humor you've placed in my heart. When my own darkness attacks me from within, please help me to reach out beyond myself to others. You have placed good friends in my life — help me to remember they are there for me! Please help me to be a friend and helper in return. Amen.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

This Lent, reach out and call or Zoom each week with someone in your life who you haven't seen or heard from in a while. You may help to reduce the isolation that person may be feeling during this lengthy pandemic.