

## **PASTOR'S CHAPTER TALK/ 16 Feb 2021: CONTEMPLATIVE HIDDENNESS**

One of the long-time pastors in our diocese, Father Ed Flanagan, died a couple of months ago in his parish in Monroe Township. He had many gifts, including a very sharp sense of humor. For example, before he became sick, when you would simply greet him and ask him how he was doing, he would often respond: "Me? I have died, and my life is now hidden with Christ in God." He was quoting from the Letter to the Colossians. How do you respond to that?

"My life is now hidden with Christ." When we think of hiding, we possibly don't have good thoughts. We think of escaping from something, escaping from responsibility, escaping from danger. Perhaps hiding means being a coward. Hiding is a children's game.

From the very first pages of the Book of Genesis, hiding is associated with fear, shame and sin. After Adam and Eve were caught eating the forbidden fruit, Adam said to God, "I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself."

However, in the Gospel we hear for tomorrow, Ash Wednesday, Jesus teaches: "But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret."

So this is the positive way to look at hiding. When we go to our interior room, we actually stop hiding from our true self. We open ourselves to our true self in Christ.

As we continue with the restrictions of the pandemic, this Lent is again an excellent opportunity to go to our interior room, to develop our inner life. So many people think religion is external practice: words, ashes on our heads, public liturgies. But the teaching of Jesus for Ash Wednesday reminds us that the priority needs to be our experience of God, a life based on purity of heart, humility and love of neighbor. And much of that is an inner experience.

In the ancient world of the desert fathers and mothers, a brother once came to Abba Moses and asked for a word of wisdom. The Abba said, "Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything." This is very similar to the words of Jesus. The cell is where you can be still and wait for wisdom from God. It is a place of interior peace, but also a place of struggle. A place of silence and listening.

We want to ask: where do we contact our inner room? It is important to have a physical space and time associated with our inner room. Maybe it is simply a chair in your house. A certain hour of the day, maybe in the early morning. Everyone needs to answer this question. We spend so much time and money going to Home Depot and Lowe's to work on our houses, but what about the inner room of our Spirit? Lent is the time to discover or re-discover our inner room.