

## Our polarized, Paranoid Times

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“Terror on every side! Let us denounce him” So begins our first reading. “Fear no one” so Jesus begins our Gospel reading today. Polarization and paranoia, religious and political is no new thing. But social media has exacerbated these tensions these days. The principal threat in oral culture was shame and ostracism, being treated like a leper. In literate modernity its neurosis and depression caused by forcing ourselves to be too rational, too productive, repressing instinctual urges, breaking down from overwork. In our new virtual culture our demons are fragmentation, paranoia and dependency. Fragmentation at dissociating our persona on different media platforms, paranoia over concerns of being monitored and manipulated through our smartphones and other devices, dependency, upon these various new tools that enable our new virtual lifestyle in the first place. Just remember the last time you misplaced your smartphone. Smartphones enhance our independence, but at the cost of making us dependent upon them.

We feel the need to watch our back because we know so many others are, who cannot always be trusted to have our best interests at heart—the government, for some even the police, patrolling for criminals, terrorists and pedophiles; corporations, in order to personalize their marketing, hackers to steal our online identities, trolls and Fake News to foment our outrage. With a need to watch our back its understandable to wonder, who has our back? God, our Father, says Christ:

Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?  
Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge.  
Even all the hairs of your head are counted.  
So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

So, who has our back? The Father says Jesus. And hopefully the Body of Christ, the Church, more specifically our church here at Our Lady of the Lake. We are called to be as attentive to one another as our Father is to the sparrows. Caring for every hair on every head. Or more to the point these days, caring for one another’s health. These masks we have to wear in public. They are irritating. They can feel suffocating. But they are also literally in our face reminders, indeed pledges of our attentiveness and care for each other’s health, neighbor and parishioner, friend and stranger. We will only overcome this epidemic by having one another’s back.

I could say more, but you get my drift. And saying more may only dilute it. Our bishop has called for three-minute homilies to limit the danger of contagion. So while this is online over cyberspace, free from the danger of contagion, this Sunday at least I think I will obey my bishop.