

May 4, 2020

Thank you for all of your expressions of condolence and sympathy at the death of my friend. He and his wife and family have taught me much about how to die well without anger or recrimination or rage. Dylan Thomas the Welsh poet famously wrote a poem on the occasion of the dying of his father at which he said:

“Do not go gentle into that good night,/Old age should burn and rage at close of day;/Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

My friend did not rage, he taught us all about a good death.

On Easter Sunday two of my young friends came to do a distance visit and they asked me what I thought we would learn from this virus and all that it is doing to us and the way we have assumed was normal.

I answered that I did not know but echoing my friend who died Saturday said that some would learn good things, and some would learn nothing, and some would probably learn ways to be cruel and hard hearted.

For many reasons today I think that the very youngest among us, in fact the younger the keener the learning, will learn about citizenship in ways that no civics class could teach.

If they have a religious background, they will learn charity or love or sacrifice in ways that no class, book, preacher or teacher could ever teach them.

In essence they are observing a whole world shutting down in order to save lives. They are observing a whole world putting itself at great inconvenience in order that others may live.

That is a pretty noble undertaking.

I know that we all have concerns for our own safety and the safety of those we love but in that we are extending that concern to a world full of strangers.

Our little ones are seeing health care folks of all kinds working tirelessly to save the lives of people.

In many, many cases little people are witnessing the love that their parents have in trying to feed and house them and keep them safe and the frustration and unfairness that life can visit upon us without warning.

They are seeing people rage scared and frightened at the losses that they are experiencing, and they are seeing some people rage taking no regard for wisdom and the more humane and just civic values that any real democracy must have to survive.

They are seeing “leaders” display a callous disregard for real human life and an ignorance of real human wisdom and they are seeing “leaders” calmly and serenely display a sincere regard for all human life and admit the enormous complexity in trying to do that and they are seeing “leaders” display passionate skill in attempting to save lives while acknowledging the sadness at the loss of lives.

Some little ones will remember this all and what they will do with those memories will be used to teach about a good life.