

**Dispatch from the Pandemic #10:
God's To Do List
by Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer**

JULY 16, 2020 — As I walked with a friend through a nearby nature preserve recently—six feet behind her—she mentioned a saying she saw on a plaque at a truck stop. She had just returned from a road trip to visit her daughter in Colorado Springs—she wasn't comfortable getting on a plane in light of COVID-19, so she got in her car and made the almost 18-hour drive.

Of course, she could not drive straight through. An empty gas tank and a full bladder demanded otherwise. It was at one of those stops where she saw the plaque. It was crowded on a shelf with other souvenir items sold in those convenience stores that line our interstate highways, selling all matter of drink, hot sausages, bags of chips, fat blueberry muffins, cans of beef stew, maps and car maintenance items. The plaque said: What would your day look like if God wrote your to do list. She didn't buy the plaque, but she took the words home.

"I try to live by those words every day," she said.

And now I have those words posted on my refrigerator.

I am not one to say prayers prescribed by others. I don't pick up a prayer book to read the words in supplication. My prayers tend to be more of my own composition, even those I repeat daily. But the Lord's Prayer is different. This is a prayer that I do say most days, though admittedly it is one I have modified to fit my own understanding of the nature of reality that is God, starting with changing the opening "Our Father" to "My Father, My Mother, My Source of Being."

One phrase I have not changed: Thy will be done. I have always found those to be such powerful words. In four short words, we find a whole theology. With those words, we submit to being powerless. Yet, as with so much of the Divine Mystery whom we call God, where what seems to be is not—in giving we receive, in losing we find, and in dying we have life—only those who has claimed their own power can admit to being powerless.

Claiming my own power is one of the gifts of this Sacred Pause, which is the name my yoga teacher is calling this time of living with a pandemic. In my own Sacred Pause, I have found much to reflect upon, and much to struggle with. This struggle includes finding the strength to claim the gifts that I have, to claim that which is within my power to do. There is also much that is not within my power to do. That's when I say OK, God, what is on your list for me to do.

Thy will be done.

As you likely do, I have a list of things that are to be accomplished in any given day, as well as things I hope to at least take a stab at, and—in all honesty—things I will be lucky if I get to in the next week.

But my list, while having some practical applications, such as I truly do need to get this dispatch written today if I am to make deadline, is beginning to take its proper place next to God's list.

My list is ephemeral, scribbled on a scrap of paper that moves from worktable to desk to kitchen counter—so I see it first thing in the morning as a reminder of what “has” to be done that day. It has no real permanency. Indeed, by week’s end, the list will be crumpled up and tossed in the recycle basket. And then I start a new list.

God’s list, on the other hand, is printed in ink, in strong block letters and taped permanently to the door of my freezer—at eye level. I can’t miss it. I will not throw it away at the end of the week.

And what is on this list that God wants me to do today? I don’t know.

So how am I to do what is on God’s list, if I don’t know what is on it? My only choice is to go through my days consciously open to what is before me and act accordingly. Of course, I often fail in this effort. But my intention is to shift my focus to something other than myself and my own priorities.

This morning, I placed what should have been a three-minute phone call to a co-worker to give her a quick update on a project. Twenty minutes later I hung up because I took the time to listen to her tell me about a family funeral she traveled to this weekend.

Yes, there is a part of me that says in those twenty minutes I could have sent out an email organizing a set of recordings. I could have begun my search for contact information of local agencies to send details about a new effort that addresses a community need. I could have made arrangements with the mail house that will be sending out the new brochure I just completed.

To which the other part of me says, *so?*

I like to think that this second part of me is the side that is closer to an authentic relationship with God.

Some may say that there are professionals to which my co-worker could have talked, that in order to be productive, we cannot let all the concerns of the world weigh on us.

Fair enough, but I am not talking about all the concerns of the world. I am talking about one person’s loss and taking a little time in a simple act of kindness to listen. To truly hear what is in another’s heart.

God’s list may be invisible to my eyes, but I think I was closer to checking off one item on that list by taking the time to actually have a conversation with a colleague in need than I was by checking anything off my list. Besides, by checking off the things on God’s list, I find myself deepening my relationship with God.

“If you don’t live from within your own center of connection and communion with God, you’ll go spinning around many other things,” writes Franciscan priest and author Richard Rohr.¹ Things like our to do lists. Yes, we need to work to pay our bills. Yes, we need to eat. Yes, we

need to do the laundry. But most importantly, as Jesus taught—and showed through his very life and death—*thy will be done*.

What would your day look like if God made up a to do list for you? My friend who first saw those words in a truck stop tells me that she has since modified the question to say: what would her life look like if God wrote her to do list. Indeed.

¹ Richard Rohr, Daily Meditations: June 29, 2020 (<https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations>)