

Merry Christmas! My prayer is that this finds you safe and well. Here's where Christmas 2020 finds me.

My year ...

2020 has been a very different year for all of us. The Covid-19 virus made its appearance early in 2020 and within weeks the whole world was different, as was I. Since mid-March, I've not traveled (beyond 7 miles to a local park), have done all lectures and talks online, and have lived within a very small bubble. All in all, it's been okay, and I feel lucky since I can still go to work every day (even if it's in an isolated office and interaction is only by Zoom). I get to celebrate mass every day and live in a community within which we've managed to live amicably in these nine months. Funny, how I had fantasized that after stepping down as President of Oblate School of Theology and after fulfilling some of my on-going commitments, I would go to a Trappist monastery for a time. Little did I know that Covid virus would come along and effectively put me in a "monastery". One has to be careful what one wishes for.

Work ...

My classes and lectures and workshops have continued as before, except all of it on Zoom. Ironically, I have been busier on the speaking circuit than last year and have learned that sometimes you can draw a bigger audience for a virtual event than in-person. I stepped down as President of OST at the beginning of September and signed on as full-time professor on our faculty. I will also help the new President with fundraising. The plan is to write the book that I have long promised, *Insane for the Light*, within the first five months of the new year. I did manage to get a book to press this year and Paraclete Press is set to release, *The Fire Within: Desire, Sexuality, Longing and God*, in Spring of 2021.

Health ...

A year ago, my oncologist declared me cancer free and stopped an oral chemotherapy drug that I had been on for five years. A check-up in July revealed a return of the cancer (two small spots). The doctors put me back on the chemo drug that I had been on for that past 5 years. The drug has no major side-effects and, again, appears to be effective. I've had two scans since July, and both indicate that the cancer is in check. This keeps me deeply grateful for my health. I work with full energy, enjoy good health, and exercise regularly. I've had to give up swimming (my "go-to" exercise) because of Covid, but our school has a small gym where I can work out regularly. Also, the campus here is some fifty acres and so there is ample space to walk.

What's next for me?

I turned 73 this year and stepped down as President of OST. But in the business I'm in (ministry, teaching, writing) one never really retires, but just moves on to whatever he can still handle. For me, that's serving on an academic faculty, writing, and giving retreats and workshops. The plan is to do that until someone, or some circumstance, says it's enough. The plan then is to return to Canada, at the end of the day, to rest with my community and kin in the Western prairies.

I leave you with a poem John Shea (theologian and poet) wrote into his Christmas card this year ...

It happens when we least expect it.

*When we wake in the night
with the worries of the day.*

*When we mask a child
too young to have her face unseen.*

*When we ache to see people
but fear to invite them.*

*When we touch a forehead
and hope it is not hot.*

*Sometimes comfort comes,
arriving as grace
into exhaustion.*

*It must be a mistake,
nothing has changed,*

Dare we allow it in?

*Are the angels of Bethlehem
still wandering the world,
trumpets uplifted,
visiting us with Christmas news?*

*“There is One among you
who brings peace.” (John Shea, 2020)*

Wishing you a healthy and blessed Christmas and 2021!

Ron Rolheiser