

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

And God Said "Stop"

I recall a weekend when an unexpected phone call came from my sister-in-law.

"We're okay," she said. "But Mom and Dad aren't."

She was talking about my wife's parents. A "Snowmageddon" storm had stampeded the mid-Atlantic and had dumped around three feet of snow on suburban Maryland, and at the time my sister-in-law called, it was still coming down.

"They lost power sometime last night," she explained. "They have no heat. Mom can't cook. And the plows can't reach them. So they're stuck. But they wanted me to call everyone and let them know they're doing okay."

Thousands of people found themselves in similar straits that weekend, as the snow fell and drifts piled up and the accumulation became relentless. This was epic. And, by all accounts, it wasn't fun. It may have been pretty. It may have been dramatic. But the lived experience, according to those who went through it, was something altogether unwelcome — cold, inconvenient, at times downright claustrophobic.

A priest in the Archdiocese of Washington blogged about it.

As Msgr. Charles Pope put it, the storm may have been God's way of telling the world: "Stop!"

"In some places God really put on the pressure," Msgr. Pope wrote. "There were power outages which prevent TVs etc. from blaring. Why, some people even rediscovered the art of conversation and telling stories. Quite remarkable actually.

But I agree with him on this: sometimes, powerful meteorological activity can be God sending us all a much-needed message.

God may be saying: Take a breath. Look around at those you know, and have forgotten about. Don't worry about football, or getting dinner done, or meeting all those self-imposed deadlines.

Stop. Look. Listen.

Hear that? It's the sound of winter silence. Snow falling. Children sledding. Go for a walk—if you can make it down your driveway—and you'll hear the muffled sounds of your own footsteps, and you may watch the world with a renewed sense of wonder.

It's beautiful.

Okay, not everyone would agree that losing electricity, and heat, and wearing your down coat and gloves to bed is appealing. Being under weather-imposed house arrest—having to stay in your home for 48 hours—mmm...isn't exactly conducive to joy.

But maybe that, too, is part of God's plan. An old saying advises us to "Bloom where you are planted." Maybe history-making storms like this one can offer us all an opportunity not to bloom, but to dig. Not to crave what is outward, but to look inward. To reflect. To yearn. To pray.

And to appreciate those simple pleasures we so often take for granted.

Like heat, hot water and that modern marvel, the electric light.

My in-laws survived the storm fine. The lights came back. The plows cleared the street. Life returned to something resembling normal.

After the storm had passed, my father-in-law said that what impressed him the most was the extraordinary generosity of his neighbors. People from down the block came to check up on them and make sure they were safe. Kids in the neighborhood helped with shoveling. Everyone suddenly felt a sense of connection, and community.

And maybe that is another message from these kinds of events.

Maybe it's something we all need to remember all the time — not just during life's sudden storms.

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