



Denver, Colorado (April 19, 2020)  
*REUTERS/Alyson McClaran*

This pandemic has forced us to sift through the entire spectrum of our feelings-vocabulary: frustration, anger, sadness, despair, as well as even pent-up (literally, in fact) hostility, hatred; and, perhaps, some fleeting moments of happiness and joy as well, over some aspects of life we used to take for granted. However, there are, also, those times when we have rampaged through the gamut of the entire human emotion range, and, quite frankly, have no idea what we feel anymore. Or, we feel so empty after this prolonged isolation that we are not so sure if we are feeling anything at all.

I wonder if the language from the first reading reveals something about us today...or, at least it did for me: “cut to the heart.” I feel *cut to the heart* for some protestors: those who have lost their family business of generations, and, in doing so, meant the end of paycheck-to-paycheck incomes not just for individual employees, but their families, who desperately depended on that immensely pivotal job for their basic livelihood. I feel *cut to the heart* for governors who seem to be in an absolutely zero-win position when it comes to protecting the maximum human life, while, also, realizing that their beloved state cannot function forever like this. I feel *cut to the heart* when images are brought to life, like the one above, which paints a rather horrifyingly eerie picture for medical personnel, who are dead-set on convincing more people to stay home, not only to save their own lives, but to minimize the number of patients they see come through the ER and ICU; who, once they get put into that respective hospital room, may never see the faces of their loved ones ever again. *Cut to the heart* may just be the closest language to come anywhere near to the thoroughly gut-wrenching circumstances for so many lives that we cannot even begin to imagine.

Oddly enough, this whole “cut to the heart” imagery in the Acts of the Apostles, sets the stage for a whirlwind of baptisms. Instead of being overjoyed of thought of thousands of people being baptized all at once, the word only adds to our longing, reminding us just how long we have not been in the same physical sanctuary with our baptized siblings in Christ; and that, most certainly, *cuts to the heart*, as well. During these Sundays of Easter, we would have begun each in-person public worship with a Thanksgiving for Baptism. That can be rather interesting, to say the least, since many of us cannot remember being baptized to begin with; begging the question of it possibly impacting our ability to be fully thankful for such a blessing on our life.

Nevertheless, we take time to be thankful for something we may never even knew...*happened* to us: a cutting to heart with joy and Holy Spirit-immersion. We give thanks for the people (parents, guardians, whomever) who brought us before God, before our new family in Christ, to become a part of them, and better yet: to never be taken away from them or God, no matter what(!?!). But...we cannot stop there with our thanksgiving. We are thankful for the job, the calling, that was bestowed on us from that day forward: disciple of Christ. We are thankful that God trusts us to do such holy work for other lives whom God cherishes just as much as our own. We are thankful for the gifts we have to share, that can positively impact children of God, which

we may never see for ourselves. We are most incredibly thankful that God still believes in us, even during these most *cut-to-the-heart* times.

So, even though, today, we are not in the same physical sanctuary, where we can hear the water poured into that font that has been through its fair share of baptisms over the years; the universal church has been encouraging people to remember their respective baptism wherever they possibly want long before this pandemic came along. Splash water on your face, make the sign of the cross on your forehead or whatever way you wish to remember that you are a precious child of God. Remember you are loved, remember the Promise God made to you that will never be broken: God is going to stick it out with you no matter what (the cross and the empty tomb made it so). Remember you have gifts, and God empowers you to use them. Remember God still believes in you.

After presiding over a few baptisms, I felt...well, *cut to the heart*, actually, by the next hymn, "Baptized and Set Free." There's something about the music: its free-flowing-ness. There's something about the rhythm: like it's building up to something. There's something about the words: "set free" from sin and death, yes, but *set free* to do something with that *ultimate* freedom. As if, even when confined, we are set free to still spring forth love and compassion. We are not set free to sit on the sidelines, and not feel *cut to the heart* by seemingly countless children of God suffering in a variety of ways during these anxiety-filled times. "Now with praise and thanksgiving, we join the song," a song that still is finding its way to keep on playing, somehow, somehow, because God refuses to put an end to it. Such love, such hope, such grace *cuts to our heart* in a most beautiful way that we cannot help but be caught up in its divine momentum through all eternity! Thanks be to God, indeed! Amen (so let it be)!