



GLOBAL MINISTRIES UNIVERSITY
Honoring the sacred in all religions and spiritual traditions

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

A HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM THE PROVOST

GMU Seeks to Melt and Move Hearts

One million, six hundred sixty thousand: a number, numb and numbing. As of this writing, that's how many lives have been lost to COVID-19 worldwide. Three hundred and ten thousand of those deaths have occurred within the United States.

Even as we know that these statistics represent death on a massive scale, it is hard for us as human beings to be touched by them emotionally. We do need the numbers to provide us with a sense of the scope and gravity of the problem, and to develop policies accordingly in response to it. But what breaks our hearts are the stories of individuals killed or impacted by the pandemic: a dear grandfather dying alone, confused and frightened, in a hospital intensive care unit; a selfless nurse succumbing to the very illness whose victims she cared for, leaving behind young children; a beloved musician whose inspiring voice has been silenced forever; a career coffee shop waitress, whose source of livelihood disappeared when the restaurant closed; a family out of options, awaiting eviction from their home into the darkness and cold of winter.

After a while, the stories of death and suffering can overwhelm as much as the tragic numbers, and we may justifiably *seek* to be numb. Current binge-on-everything jokes and confessions - from wine-drinking to bread-baking to TV marathons to video games – attest to our human need for comfort and distraction when events in the world ask too much of us. We should indulge that need now and then – even St. Teresa of Avila, who lived a life of strict Carmelite asceticism, is said to have grabbed her castanets on one bleak winter's day and played them with passion as she danced around the cloister. When her shocked sisters disapproved of her apparent pleasure, she responded, “We all need a little something to make life bearable.”

But continuous numbness, whatever its source, accustoms us to tragedy. What was unthinkable a year ago has become normal. Since March, we've seen powerful entities – political parties, mega-corporations, and the people helming them – attempt, often successfully, to coax us, citizens and consumers, into numbness. *Everything is really okay*, they've assured us. *COVID-19 isn't so bad. Don't let experts tell you what to do. What matters is that the stock market is booming. You need stuff – you can buy it with the click of a mouse and get second-day shipping! - to keep you happy.* These lulling messages flow steadily on the

networks and in social media platforms. They're necessary to those at the top because numbed people don't ask hard questions, don't fill the streets in protest, don't organize, don't challenge lies.

The holidays we celebrate at this time of year can be sweet, sentimental, busy-making...and numbing. But the events that they commemorate? Hardly. God taking flesh as a helpless infant who is Light of the World (Christmas); undying light as Yahweh's faithful presence (Hanukkah); the return of the sun upon which all life depends (Solstice) – all are stirring awakenings. Entering fully into them today can still bring us to our knees, flood us with feeling, and restore us to vision. The un-numb arise and call human beings back to humanity: defending the vulnerable, working for justice, and sacrificing for peace, joining all the while in the cosmic, light-enabled dance of praise.

All our work at GMU is about the un-numbing of hearts, through study and scholarship, ministry, celebrancy/ritual, activism, peacebuilding, and global outreach. Now in the midst of our sacred holidays, even as a pandemic continues to ravage, let us remember and celebrate our privileged mission.

Be blessed in your work of moving and awakening, GMU community - at Christmas, Hannukah, Solstice, and through the New Year.

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