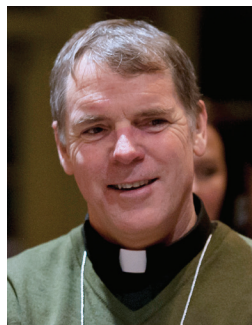


But then a few times I caught him when he thought no one was looking. Owen's smile deserted him, his eyes darkened, and twenty years seem to be added to his age. In that moment, I saw Owen as he perhaps saw himself: essentially fatherless, untethered, and sinking fast without knowing why. What will come of this boy? I thought.

One night toward the end of the trip, I went looking for Owen because he was not with us as we huddled around a bonfire on the beach. I found him a few blocks away, sitting with Brendan at the end of a pier. Owen's right arm cupped Brendan, held him close. I could hear Brendan sobbing.

St. Augustine was purported to have said, "We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song." He is, of course, right, but I have to admit these days, I count it as evidence of the Holy Spirit working in me when I sing Alleluia! at Mass or prayer. I take a glimpse outside my Christie Hall window and onto a world reeling, frightened, frustrated. I see all these Brendans out there, suffering silently, alone, wondering if they're going to make it. It still feels like Lent to me. Perhaps it will for a long while. But then I think of Owen, who, on one lonely night, outflanked fear and reached lovingly across a great divide and found—and this I hope—that his life was not gone at all. And neither would Brendan's. They were, on that pier, being reborn.

Fr. W. Patrick Hannon, C.S.C., was ordained in 1989 and has invested much of his ministry in educational apostolates of Holy Cross. He is currently a faculty member at the University of Portland where he teaches writing with a focus on the personal essay, narrative, memoir, and profile writing. He has had published three collections of narrative essays (*Running Into the Arms of God: Stories of Prayer, Prayer as Story*, 2005; *Geography of God's Mercy: Stories of Mercy and Forgiveness*, 2007; *The Long Yearning's End: Stories of Sacrament and Incarnation*, 2009; ACTA Publications), and one collection of personal essays: *Sacrament: Personal Encounters with Memories, Wounds, Dreams and Unruly Hearts* (Ave Maria Press, 2014). His essays have appeared in *The Gold Man Review*, *Timberline Review*, *Notre Dame Magazine*, *Portland Magazine*, *The Utne Reader*, and *US Catholic*.



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Office of Development  
P.O. Box 765, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0765  
[www.holycrossusa.org](http://www.holycrossusa.org)  
[development@holycrossusa.org](mailto:development@holycrossusa.org)

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## MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

# Don't It Always Seem To Go

by Rev. Patrick Hannon, C.S.C.



CONGREGATION OF  
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I've been waiting out the Covid-19 pandemic mostly in my apartment in Christie Hall on the campus of the University of Portland. To maintain my sanity, I pray and dine with my Holy Cross community every night (carefully, keeping our safe distance, washing our hands). Thank God for my Holy Cross confrères. These days, I've gained a deeper and renewed appreciation for religious life in Holy Cross. Chock up one grace borne of this horrible virus. I'm thinking now of Joni Mitchell's song Big Yellow Taxi and the lyric that goes, "Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got/Till it's gone." We sit, two to a table now, mixing it up throughout the week, so that, after a couple weeks, we've each spent 45-50 minutes of one-on-one time with everyone else. I think we've become a more loving, patient, generous community. Take that, Covid-19. This life we lead, it's not gone at all. It's being reborn.

I also go on my daily walks—maintaining, of course, sufficient social distancing from dogs and their walkers, joggers and runners, gardeners. On one of those walks in mid-March, just as everything was shutting down, I ran into Spiderman, Elsa, and the Batman. Well, actually, they were three costumed children on three different streets who had emerged from their respective homes to play superhero in their front yards. Later, as I sat in my apartment deciding if I was going to grab another movie from my

Netflix queue or read or pray or clean out one more closet, it struck me that those children were like little prophets sent from God to remind me that I had nothing to be afraid of. In their capacious imaginations (these newly constructed creative factories are humming with energy!) they knew, with a little faith, we can, all of us, outflank our fears. We may be hunkered down in place, confined to square footage that has an incarcerating

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“ God, I am convinced, has never been closer. ”

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feel to it. We may be wondering why we didn't buy stock in Purell and Charmin. We may be muttering, "So this is what Grandma must have been feeling during the Great Depression (anxious, worried, overwhelmed)." But, then along comes someone who reminds us who we are and whose we are: We are God's children. He loves us. And His love—which finds its greatest expression in compassion and mercy, banishes fear. So in the tiny acre of our solitude, we make space for our Abba who will arrive (often when we least expect) and nourish our weary souls. We may be social distancing from each other, but God, I am convinced, has never been closer.

I'm thinking now about a trip I took

twenty years ago, with a group of students in Chicago. We went to Ireland for a service-learning experience. We spent a week on the Wexford coast with some tough Dublin teenagers—kids who rarely got to see the Irish Sea, the gentle current of the River Slaney or the forests of the Wicklow Mountains. One of the Irish boys—I'll call him Brendan—had a scar that ran down his left cheek. I found out early on that his father had cut him with a carpet cutter in a drunken rage a while back, so Brendan kept to himself mostly, rarely spoke, and never cried.

One of the Chicago boys who had taken the trip—I'll call him Owen—came because his mother told him he had to. A week before the trip, Owen's dad had been arrested and was sitting in a Cook County jail cell. His mother thought the trip would do Owen good. And it did seem to. Occasionally, I saw him wrestling happily with a few of the Irish boys, his mop of black hair matted down in joyful sweat, his pack-a-day cigarette habit a seemingly distant memory. He laughed heartily and matched the Irish boys cuss word for cuss word.

