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I read the New York Times. I don't actively enjoy it, but it's a habit and a useful exercise. If you don't believe the "Grey Lady" has a point of view, then you might want to forego the rest of this essay...

...which isn't a criticism of the paper's ethos, but acknowledges that institutions can coalesce around ideologies, for better or worse.

These days, one might describe the tone of the *Times* as "ominous." In fact, an AI-generated text search of any recent issue will find multiple pejorative uses of the phrase in the previous sentence – "these days" – a hint at sinister and dystopian elements of the Trump era. Anxiety is another popular word in the *Times*...these days. An article in today's paper – generally celebratory about something as potentially joyful as a well-executed ("glorious sounding") new Broadway revival – manages to shoehorn "especially now (these days)" and "anxiety" into a single, dark, politically-inspired sentence. The author then says, "Something about all that hits hard right now...the idea that when we're in danger...our community will show up to help, and the government, too." These words sit in curious juxtaposition to the writer's observation about the actual show: "Lincoln Center Theater's vast and airy Broadway stage becomes an exalted evocation..."

Nihilism is a powerful device. Spread hopelessness and you sow desperation. People in need, filled with sorrow, seek salvation. It's where they choose to find it that gets tricky. Is it the government, as suggested above, or is there something more sustainable and enriching available to the human soul?

Admittedly, I can be cynical. Jamil Zaki, director of the Stanford Social Neuroscience Lab calls cynicism a "trap" in his book, *Hope for Cynics: The Surprising Science of Human Goodness*. He posits that cynicism – the belief that people are generally selfish, greedy, and dishonest – makes us feel "safer and smarter." But Zaki cautions that a cynical worldview might also have a negative effect on health, leading to depression, heart disease, and burnout. He maintains that cynicism and negativity don't statistically result in higher intellectual function or increased security. Zaki concedes that the world is an imperfect place, though it also contains much that is good. He encourages people to be "hopeful skeptics" rather than nihilistic cynics. He says cleverly, "Cynicism is a lack of faith in people, while skepticism is a lack of faith in our (own) assumptions."

Speaking of faith, Easter tends to prod some of us to consider ours, in the spiritual sense. The self-centered, self-pitying perspective inherent in the lament, "in these times," often expressed from the relative comfort of a midtown tower or television studio or (most self-indulgently) home office, seems petty and trivial when framed against the idea of graciously accepting one's own torture

and murder for the sake of the rest of mankind.

Jenna and I attended Easter Vigil Mass at the Cathedral Basilica. It lasted about 2 hours and 20 minutes, roughly the duration of a Broadway show, coincidentally. It began in relative darkness. Candles were eventually lit. The illumination in the sanctuary increased as the evening progressed, revealing gorgeously arranged flowers of pure white, gentle pink, delicate salmon, and vibrant green. Not once did I feel anxious or depressed about "these times." Rather, I sat in wonder and appreciation for a story that has endured for millennia, offering itself to me as a choice. And I choose the possibility of redemption. I choose hope. Not for some organized human authority to heal me, but for the supernatural strength within me that is a gift from a giver I'll never fully understand.

The Pope died the morning after Easter. As Jenna said, "That's a mic drop!" He was gravely sick when we traveled to Rome in late February. We thought he'd pass away then. But there he was, puffy from steroids, puttering through St. Peter's Square on resurrection Sunday, hours before taking his final rest.

There are people who want us to feel angry and resentful and hopeless and betrayed. It's great business for them. Consider the idea of the Pope himself. The cynic-nihilist sees the pontiff as a clownishly regaled titular head of an impossibly wealthy institution filled with deviant authority figures bent on subjugating men and women to perpetuate their collective avaricious ends. Others see him as a principled, feisty-yet-gentle old man who reminds us through his words and actions that we are capable of love and charity, that there is grace in suffering, and that life is corporeal and temporal, and the most profound joy begins when it ends. Indeed, we have free will to remember Francis as we wish. In these times...in any time...as Zaki suggests, it doesn't hurt to embrace the good. It's the healthy option.

For a long time, I considered Thanksgiving my favorite holiday, and it remains high on my list. Perhaps, it has something to do with getting vulnerably older, but Easter has taken the top spot for me. Spring is optimistic and energetic and vividly colorful. Around Easter time, everything seems to be on the rise.

Scott A. Lawrence

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