

Seeking God's Peace in Troubled Times



Christopher News Notes

IN HIS LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS, ST. PAUL TELLS US, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

But finding God's promised peace can be a challenge when we are dealing with unprecedented situations, such as the coronavirus pandemic,

or even more common problems, such as medical, financial, and relationship issues. Human beings are prone to experience fear and panic when life leads us down dark roads. So how can we seek God's peace during troubled times?

“Pray a Little Harder”

As many cities and states shut down all non-essential businesses during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in order to slow the spread of the disease, people found themselves isolated in their homes for weeks on end. Legendary Los Angeles Dodgers baseball broadcaster Vin Scully commented on his experiences to the *Los Angeles Times*: “A lot of people will look at [the situation], and it might bring them closer to their faith. They might pray a little harder, a little longer, so there might be good things to come out of it.”

Turning to prayer in times of trouble—and also in good times—is a foundational aspect of the spiritual life. It establishes or maintains our connection to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It may take the form of “official” prayers, such as the “Our Father” and “Hail Mary.” Or we may want to talk to God in our own words, as if we were unloading our burdens to a friend.

Remember, prayer should be considered a conversation. We talk to God, and then we need to listen to discover what He is saying to us. There will be times when we feel disconnected from God and wonder why He's not responding to our prayers. But we need to keep praying, to keep the conversation going anyway. Even if we don't feel His presence, God is there.

In a video on his Youtube page, Gary Zimak, an author and public speaker focused on moving people from fear to faith, acknowledged that it is normal for people to feel worried during a crisis. But he also pointed out, “Here's the good news: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever...In the Scriptures, Hebrews 13:8, we're told that message...You need to remember, if you're

going to find any peace in these trying times, Jesus Christ is here, He is with us, and He does not change. This gives us a great opportunity to be able to trust Him in the midst of the storm...If you are afraid, if you are concerned, you are absolutely justified...But that fear should move us closer to Jesus...The secret to finding peace and rest in this craziness is keeping your eyes on Jesus.”

Prayer can help bring us the peace we desire, so make it a point to put aside some time each day. Father James Keller, the founder of The Christophers, believed we could all find at least “three minutes a day” to quietly pray and reflect on God, on life, and on the world in which we live. But we can also squeeze short prayers into our days in ways we may not have even considered.

Actress and producer Roma Downey practices a ritual that helps her maintain an attitude of gratitude throughout her day. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she said, “This might sound really simple, but sometimes it's the simple that can be the most helpful. Every time I wash my hands, I remember to say, ‘Thank You, God. Thank You for my blessings.’...And you think, ‘I'll remember all day to be in gratitude’—until the first phone call from work, the first stressful thing that has to be dealt with, the first worry over one of your kids. It can throw your whole balance [off]. Then the next thing, I'm washing my hands, and I remember to go back into gratitude and thank God. It has made such a difference in my life—a simple thing, but a very powerful tool.”

Stop Taking Blessings For Granted

It's easy to take our blessings for granted until they unexpectedly disappear. Look around you and count the people, things, and situations you have to be grateful for. Then ask yourself: do I remember to be grateful for them every day? Many don't, so times of crisis remind us not to overlook our blessings.

One blessing that Catholics came to appreciate more greatly during the coronavirus pandemic was

the sacraments, especially attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist. As churches were closed and public Masses suspended to protect the faithful from the disease, many expressed disappointment at this major change that cut them off from their church communities at a time when they craved connection and wanted to receive the Body of Christ in the form of Holy Communion. But Father Sam Sawyer, S.J. pointed out in *America* magazine, “The Mass has power whether we are able to be there in person or not; it has power even if it can only be celebrated under limited and restricted circumstances, because God is not bound by circumstance.”

In many cases, people adjusted by watching Masses on TV or online. And during the point in the Mass when the Eucharist was distributed, viewers were asked to take part in “spiritual communion,” which is always a wonderful resource for the homebound and the infirm. Viewers are invited to pray, “My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.”

“We Have to Belong to One Another”

Communion, of course, reminds us of community. God created us to be in relationship with others, and times of crisis remind us of that vital truth. When Christopher Award-winning author and Duke Divinity School professor Kate Bowler was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer, she required surgery soon after. But her parents lived in Canada and couldn't immediately travel to be with her in North Carolina. As a result, others rallied around the 35-year-old wife and mother.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Kate explained, “All the people who were around in my beautiful Divinity School...showed me that we

have to belong to one another. So the more helpless and reliant I became, the more I realized how important it is to have that web of obligation in which we don't feel embarrassed by our neediness. We just know, 'I can't do this on my own.' My lovely, sweet local Methodist church fed me for a year. They took turns bringing food over when we couldn't take care of ourselves. So I've been absolutely held up by the people who've chosen to love me."

During periods of self-isolation due to the coronavirus, some parents and children, who might ordinarily each have been off doing their own thing, found themselves spending more time together and appreciating the gift of family. Tory, a retired firefighter with 9/11-related emphysema, noted that his daughter was returning home from college because her classes were cancelled. He said, "With everyone being busy, quality time is limited. Now that we are forced to slow down, I am going to make the best of it."

Some people, however, especially seniors and those with pre-existing conditions, were forced to be by themselves so they wouldn't contract the virus. Finding comfort in community seemed like an impossibility. Yet efforts were still made to help them.

Jayde Powell, a pre-med student in Reno, Nevada, created "Shopping Angels," a group of volunteers that deliver food and groceries to those who can't leave their homes. Though it started as a local effort, people around the country heard of the idea and started chapters in their own communi-

ties. That's in addition to all the individual "neighbors helping neighbors" that went on during the crisis. When we reach out to accomplish some good for another person, it brings us a sense of peace. And the people on the receiving end of the goodness should also feel peace, knowing that someone cares about them.

There are other steps, too, that you can take to find peace: listen to music that calms you down or brings you joy; read a good book or watch an uplifting movie or TV program; connect with friends online or on the phone; take a walk in nature to appreciate the beauty of God's earth; or say short, simple prayers throughout your day, such as "Lord, grant me Your peace" or "Light of the World, be my light."

Ultimately, finding peace during troubled times requires an act of faith. So allow yourself to feel concerned about the realities around you and plan to deal with them the best you can. Also, ask God to sustain and guide you with His supernatural wisdom and grace, remembering always that we are all beloved children of God who are never truly alone.

"Prayer in a Time of Peril"

Sarah Hart (sarahhartmusic.com)

I know Your hand is not at rest,
nor Your eyes, distracted,
nor Your voice, silent.
I know that with each breath, You are with me.
Each beat of my heart is Your song;
each morning, every evening, Your gift.
But oh, my dear God, these are troubled days,
and I am prone to fear.
Please, in my fear, reveal to me verdant pastures;
in my loneliness, go with me to still waters;
in this struggle, restore my soul.
And if it is in shadow that I must walk,
take my hand and do not let me go
until there is no evil left to fear.
With Your love, may I love;
with Your hope, may I hope,
all the days of my life.
Amen.

**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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