

Five ways of sustaining faith in difficult times - prayer

You know if we're not praying people, in love with God and taking time each day to fall deeper in love with God then I don't know what faith is about. For me prayer is to enable us to deepen our loving relationship with God through Christ.

Desire for God is at the heart of prayer and silence enables to God to meet that desire and to fulfil it. So I would encourage anyone to spend some time in silence each day.

If you watched the television programme the 'The Big Silence' narrated by Fr Christopher Jamieson you will have seen five people step back from their hectic lives and experience silence and all of them without exception had to face a difficult journey as they moved beyond themselves but it was a life-giving journey. It might be difficult to move beyond that which often fills our hearts and minds, ourselves, but it is the most extraordinary experience that become impossible to live without. So, take time each day to be still and to be silent and open your heart to God.

Silence restores us and brings us wellsprings of hope within that we never knew existed. It is the source of our power to bring unconditional love into the world we live in.

- **Light a candle.**
- **Take time to breathe.**
- **Use a sacred word to get you to a place of inner quiet.**
- **Repeat your word gently as you need to focus your attention.**

Five ways of sustaining faith in difficult times - reality

Each of us is called to be real, loving and honouring our lives and our humanity. I think one of our tasks as church is to help nourish and protect the goodness of humanity in a world that's often hostile to us. We are to offer the world the real wisdom that can be found in Jesus and in his way. The wisdom of Christian spirituality is that it does offer a human life that is rich, vibrant and fulfilling and a foretaste of all that is to come.

Our human nature is holy, in many ways damaged and broken but holy none the less. Incarnation tells us that we must take our humanity seriously and any form of spirituality that makes us reject the reality of who we are is not ever going to satisfy our desire for God. We, in our humanity, reflect the nature of God. The greatest witness we can give to the Gospel is to be really human and alive.

What does that mean in these times of coronavirus? Maybe it means praying that everyone is aware of their own dignity and the wonder of humanity. Maybe it means reminding ourselves that God isn't angry with the world but weeps with us at this time. Perhaps it is about reminding us that we all are the pinnacle of God's creation.

- **Take time each day to remind yourself that you matter.**
- **Take time to remind others how precious they are.**
- **Thank God for the gift of being human and alive.**

Five ways of sustaining faith in difficult times - gratitude

Ronald Rolheiser says that the only heart that can transform the world is the grateful heart. Why? I think it is because the world does not understand gratitude. The grateful heart is the heart that knows the very reason for its existence lies in the love of another and the world does not any longer understand that we owe our very existence to another. Our gratitude can remind others of the presence of God. It maybe reminds others that only in God is peace and happiness to be found much needed in these troubled and difficult times.

What are we to be grateful for? Maybe it's the gift of life, the gift of the world, the gift of energy, sexuality, people. There is so much to be thankful for if we take time to reflect on our lives. A spirit of gratitude is an alternative to all negativity. It's an alternative to hatred and suspicion, judgement and condemnation. It's not so much an emotion as a decision to view the world in a particular way. It's to face the world with a heart that's open rather than a heart which is suspicious or presumes badness rather than goodness. It's a way of embracing the world rather than separating oneself from it.

In the grateful heart there is room for acceptance understanding compassion and love. It is those things that transform our beautiful broken world and the key to it all is gratitude.

- **When you wake, choose five things to be grateful for.**
- **Spend a few moments thanking God for all you are given.**
- **Cultivate gratitude each day for the food you eat.**
- **Pray that God changes your heart to a grateful heart.**

Five ways of sustaining faith in difficult times - community

I think it would be true to say that for Jesus the two great commandments are inseparable. Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. We are called not just as individuals but as community. There is no room in Christianity for going it alone.

The Gospel invites us to recognise our need of the other, to know that real life comes from community. It's about 'us' rather than 'me'. We don't walk the journey alone. It seems to me that the desire for community has been planted in our hearts by God and that it reflects the reality of who God is, a God who is one, a God who is in perfect relationship.

So, what about our parish communities in these difficult times when we can't gather together? Are we no longer Church because we can't celebrate the sacraments in our normal ways? Of course not, we are Church. We are community. We are one. Maybe these difficult times will help us recognise the gift of one another.

- **Take time each day to pray for your community.**
- **Contact people by phone, text, email just to say 'hello'.**
- **Gather people on your computer if you can, and have a time of prayer.**
- **If you are able, call into the church when it's open and spend time in prayer.**

Five ways of sustaining faith in difficult times - reaching out

That challenge to reach out can be found throughout the Scriptures. Maybe we need to hear it now more than at any other time. The prophets are constantly inviting us to reflect on the call to be on the side of the little ones. Richard Rohr says 'any experience of grace tells us that history is not about us. In fact, my own life is not about me.' I think now more than any other time we have an opportunity to look out for our neighbours and to create what Pope Paul VI called a 'society of sharing solidarity and love.'

What can we do? In these challenging times we can keep our eyes open for those who are isolated, lonely and need help. We can make sure our neighbours have enough shopping. We can phone people and encourage people. We can make sure that we only buy what we need and not more than that. We can pray for others constantly, particularly those who are struggling. We can pray that we move away from our own individualism where it's me and my needs that matter to a place where we live for the common good and make decisions for the common good. We can focus our attention outwards rather than inwards and maybe we can change the world.

- **Take time each day to phone people you know.**
- **Take time each day to pray for others and for yourself.**
- **When shopping, look for what you need and not what you panic about.**
- **Have care for those in complete isolation and see what they need.**