

We included these 2 handouts in a previous newsletter in the early stages of lockdown.

It seems right to offer them again now.

A Meditation for the Anxious During Covid-19

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

Bring your breathing under control. It's hard. We're in uncertain times, uncharted waters. Our breaths might be short, panicked. We may have forgotten to breathe all together.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

Slowly, read Psalm 46:11: *"Be still and know that I am God!"* God is speaking to you. How do you respond? Be still and know that I am God.

God of all people, my faith is tested during this time of pandemic. Your houses of prayer and worship stand empty: Can we gather together without contracting disease? Can the most vulnerable members of our human family — the elderly, the sick — come to pray without fear? The answer to these questions, it seems, is no.

Be still and know that I am.

God, I know that you are here, even if I sit alone in my home. Just as you appeared to Moses in the burning bush, you appear to us now, in surprising, unsettling ways.

I may not find you where I expect you — my community, the Mass, the Eucharist — but give me eyes to find you in new places: livestreams, Zoom, Face time and quiet solitude.

Be still and know.

God of the sick, God of the vulnerable, give me clarity to see through the noise and clutter. Grant me serenity that I may have a level head with which to weigh the information I am given. Sustain me with fortitude that I may have the courage to learn all I need to know about this disease that plagues our world.

I do not want to give in to fear, panic, hysteria. But I do want to make good decisions, for myself, my community and my world. Help me to do so.

Be still.

I know that I have had to change my daily life, my daily routine. I know that I can no longer come and go as I wish. In this season, remind me of the spiritual significance of fasting: setting things aside to make room for you, God, and for the common good. Give me a spirit of fasting as I confront this disease.

May I see these moments of stillness — moments that I am not out at bars, restaurants, events and activities — as opportunities to encounter you. And as my small yet important contribution to the common good of our world.

Be.

I feel as though there is so little I can do to bring about an end to this crisis. Grant me the wisdom to simply be, to sit, to rest, to watch and to trust that your hand is at work, guiding and protecting medical professionals, scientists, first responders and government officials, as well as my neighbours, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

(Created by the Passionists of the Graan, Enniskillen)



God does not send plagues to teach us things, though we can learn from them

Richard Leonard

“Some Christians seem to have a very limited image of the Holy Trinity: nasty God the Father in heaven; sweet, lovely Jesus And the bird! While the creeds teach that there is one God in three persons, they act as one in creating, saving and inspiring. In John’s Gospel Jesus says he does nothing on his own (5:30), “the Father and I are one” (10:30); and “to have seen me is to have seen the Father” (14:9). Christians believe that Jesus came to fulfil the Old Testament; they believe, too, that everything in the Old Testament should be interpreted through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

This matters when we come to understand the meaning of plagues and other natural disasters. For the peoples of the ancient world, if there was a flood, plague or pestilence then God was saying something through it. But in the Gospels Jesus never sends a plague, a natural disaster or turns anyone into a pillar of salt. If Jesus isn’t into murderous retribution, nor, if we take him at his repeated word, is God the Father. Jesus is the incarnate correction to false views of how God works in the world.

So, even through Covid-19’s origins are yet to be finally established, they have a natural explanation, and the way the virus has spread has been in measure the result of poor human decisions. God has not sent the pandemic upon us.

Wherever there is a local or a global catastrophe, whether it is the fire that destroyed the roof of Notre Dame or the spread of Aids, there are always some Christians who say that it has been sent as a punishment by God for various contemporary sins. This reveals a belief in God as a kind of extra-powerful figure ruling the universe, a chief executive who tolerates bad behaviour up to a point, but then his patience snaps and he stops the nonsense, sending a tsunami or a pandemic to remind us who is boss.

God as a vengeful tyrant is a neat if frightening solution to the deep pain in our lives: our suffering has to come from somewhere, and perhaps it is understandable that some seek the explanation that it is sent directly by God.

But there is a huge difference between God permitting evil in our world and God perpetrating such acts upon us. The Church teaches that the first proposition is true, but not the second, although listening to some Christians talking about the coronavirus pandemic you would be forgiven for thinking it did. Because God

wants us to be fully free, our world holds the possibility of our choosing evil; if it were otherwise, we would be marionettes. This is a world away from God directly causing suffering and destruction.

Just because sometimes people grow through pain and suffering, it does not mean God sent these things as a test: rather this growth is a testament to God accompanying us through every moment, inspiring us to be in solidarity with all God’s children, so that together we make the best decisions in the shadow of death and the valley of tears.

Nor does God send plagues to teach us things, though we can learn from them, and we are learning a lot right now about our delicate relationship with the created order and how poor choices made in one place can have unintended consequences in other places. We are also learning that the best response to natural disasters or health emergencies is transparency, good government, honest reporting, human ingenuity, responsible citizenship, and valuing the common good; we are also learning how extraordinarily resilient some of us are in the face of tragedy.

How can I be so confident that God is not deadly by nature? Because the God revealed in Jesus Christ is not a tyrant but a lover, a God prepared to go to any lengths – even to give up his life on the Cross – to save us, even though we do not deserve it. John 1:5 says, “God is light, in him there is no darkness.” If that is true, plagues and pandemics cannot be part of an arsenal of weapons deployed by an angry God to punish us or our selfishness and greed.

Spiritual sanity in these difficult days rests in seeing that every moment of every day God does what he did on Good Friday: not intervening to prevent humanity killing Jesus, but not allowing evil and despair to have the last word.

The power of amazing grace enables us to make the most of even the worst situations, to help each other in every way we can, and to let light and life have the last word. Easter Sunday is God’s response to Good Friday: life out of death.”

Richard Leonard SJ is the author of What does it all mean? A guide to living lives of faith, hope and love (Paulist Press