Spirituality





by Stephanie Yeagle

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NCR recently asked how to keep spiritually grounded in a pandemic crisis. Readers responded with how they deepen their faith life and spiritual practice by discovering new prayers and rituals or participating in livestreamed events. Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

A very spiritual friend of mine, whom I phoned the day after my country went into lockdown, drew my attention to the following text:

> "Bow down, then, before the power of God now,
>
> so that he may raise you up in due time;
>
> unload all your burden on to him,
>
> since he is concerned about you.
>
> Keep sober and alert,
>
> because your enemy the devil is on the prowl
>
> like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.
>
> Stand up to him, strong in faith and in the knowledge
>
> that it is the same kind of suffering
>
> that the community of your brothers
>
> throughout the world is undergoing.
>
> You will have to suffer only for a little while:
>
> the God of all grace
>
> who called you to eternal glory in Christ

will restore you,

he will confirm, strengthen and support you.

His power lasts for ever and ever. Amen."

(1 Peter 5:6-11 JB)

It came to her attention, seemingly, by accident. But we know that God answers our prayers, often in ways we do not expect. I have decided to read it every day of this crisis and to pray that by God's power a better world will emerge post COVID-19.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

I am 81 and live on my own. This crisis brings home to me how little I have done to show my love to the needy and how powerless I am without my Savior, Jesus Christ. God's presence has become much more real to me.

BERNARD THOMAS HARRINGTON

Katikati, New Zealand



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I've joined streaming spiritual and faith sharing opportunities, including those led by Jesuit Fr. Jim Martin. I also watched a virtual Lenten mission led by Cardinal Sean O'Malley on CatholicTV and streaming online.

I am also a daily user of the app "Pray As You Go," which is produced by the Jesuits of Great Britain. Daily reflections, devotions and of course many versions of the examen are contained within the app. It truly has something for everyone.

I also subscribe to "Give Us This Day," a daily prayer resource.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

The Gospel for the last weekend in January was the story of Jesus asleep in the storm-tossed boat, with the disciples waking him with their statements of fear ("Do you not see that we are perishing?"). I've been carrying that story ever since, which has been increasingly in my mind and heart as the coronavirus crisis has escalated. I have also been praying with a reflection, on that same Gospel, written by St. Augustine about waking up the Christ who is asleep inside of us during times of tumult.

PAUL CHRISTIAN

Boston, Massachusetts

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Centering Prayer has been a daily practice of mine for the past 15 years. I do it twice a day, first thing in the morning and again before dinner. I facilitate a group session each Thursday evening. As I begin each session, I consent to God's action and presence in my life. I then sit in silence. I use a sacred word whenever a thought creeps in to remind me to return to my silence and alert receptivity of God's presence. At this time of the coronavirus, I feel more called to periods of silence and the stabilizing impact that it has on my life. Centering Prayer is practice developed by Fr. Thomas Keating, the founder of Contemplative Outreach.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

I am so thankful for my faith always and its sustaining impact especially in times of difficulty.

ROBERT J. FERKENHOFF

Nokomis, Florida

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I am finding Sulpician Fr. Raymond E. Brown's *The Death of the Messiah* a great resource right now. I am only reading the commentary sections of his magnificent work but it gives me an opportunity to very slowly and sometimes prayerfully follow Jesus through the night after the Last Supper. I take Brown's commentary in small doses and that has proved to be the best way for me to spend a part of each day as I shelter at home.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

I think for the most part my faith and an appreciation for the Communion of Saints that is so deeply implanted in our faith, makes me more aware of those who are suffering from the coronavirus but also of those who are tending to them.

DONALD CASEY

Mahwah, New Jersey

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As a queer Catholic, I'm compelled by the power of the rosary. I've been praying it daily with particular affinity for the hail holy queen at conclusion. The protection, comfort and healing offered by the Blessed Mother nurtures my soul. I hope to see a resurgence of the rosary and its reclamation by folks on the margins, the vulnerable and the forgotten. I hope it gives folks with more privilege a sense of perspective and a thirst for justice.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

My spiritual practice has allowed me to maintain a sense of routine and structure during uncertain times and it connects me with a higher power to rely on when so many things are out of my hands. It's also been helpful for my partner (an atheist) to see the power and solace of spiritual practice. I bought a rosary for him as a gift!

MATT GALKOWSKI

New Orleans, Louisiana

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Spiritual resources:

1. "Spiritual Sustenance for the Self-Quarantined" daily reflections by Christine Marie Eberle. These are really wonderful and I cannot recommend them highly enough
2. "Sacred Space" by the Irish Jesuits
3. "dotMagis" from Ignatian Spirituality
4. "Living Lent Daily" from Loyola Press

Connecting with old friends in various locations. Connecting with my six siblings via text and "virtual cocktail hour." My husband and two daughters who are home from college.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

Having the luxury to spend uninterrupted time in prayer each morning because I have no place to go, no appointments to make, etc., has been wonderful and I am very grateful.

JODEE FINK

Cresskill, New Jersey

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This trying time of isolation is not new to me. I experienced it once before in Northern California when many of us, who were survivor/advocates in the clergy abuse crisis, were shunned/shamed out of our parishes and forced to find an alternative, spiritual life. Saying the rosary and Marian devotions, once consoling, went out the door because I associated them with those who had humiliated us.

Each Sunday for 20 years, my husband and I celebrated an ersatz Mass at our kitchen table, using the readings for the day and Gospel commentaries by William Barclay and Charles Spurgeon. We elevated bread and wine remembering our Lord's sacrifice and his earthly persecution (so like ours). We prayed for the church and our perceived enemies. Sometimes our adult children and their friends joined us.

Now we live on a beautiful, 10-acre property near Glacier Park. Although our parish church is closed and we have no close friends there, we are blessed with the presence of four of our children nearby and my retired, missionary brother and his wife nearby. Currently, spending online time with Pope Francis at daily Mass is my delight. Together my husband and I start each morning with readings from daily devotionals, a chapter from one of Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr's marvelous books, then recite "Our Father," "Hail Mary," "Glory Be," "Morning Offering" (redesigned to fit our times) and Augustine's Holy Spirit prayer.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to say that, both in our previous life in California and our current life here in Montana, NCR has always served us well as our personal support and church in exile.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

Memories of my devout parents, the education received from the Sisters of Charity as well as the mentoring and example by fellow Catholic-Christians along life's journey support me well during this second crisis in my life.

NANCY McGUNAGLE

Kalispell, Montana

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When Pennsylvania's governor put on the stay in place order and all my volunteer activities were cancelled, I breathed a sigh of relief and saw this time as a retreat. As the weeks have passed, I have kept a "City Liturgy" that I found on Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister's Monasteries of the Heart website. So my day has been structured around a simple way to remember to be continually in the presence of God. I start each day with reading Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr's daily meditations, the readings of the day and a half hour of Centering Prayer. Throughout the day, according to my "City Liturgy," I remember to come into God's presence. In the early evening, I read another meditation or scriptures, journal and do another half-hour of Centering Prayer. Just before bed, some friends and I pray together in communion for a few minutes. This continuing retreat has united me with God and the world in our universal suffering. I have found joy and peace and oneness.

In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you to deal with the crisis?

My faith has shown me that God is in this crisis. There is no way to separate us from God.

BARBARA J. BAKER

Lewisburg, Pennsylvania

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Read this next: NCR readers share how they keep spiritually grounded, part two