

Prayer in the face of life's difficulties

We all face challenges in our lives. The most serious of those challenges sometimes results in a crisis of faith. It takes faith to pray and so the double jeopardy we face in such a crisis is an inability to pray. A feeling of abandonment, a feeling of loss, a feeling of hopelessness can follow quickly on the heels of such a crisis. Without faith and without prayer we feel alone and lost. How can this cycle be broken?

“Be still before the Lord, wait for God.” (Ps7:7) We can begin to find faith again by simply finding a place to be quiet and still. There will be plenty of time to engage again in conversation with God but for the moment, when prayer and faith are in short supply, just listen. God speaks to us in marvelous ways but hearing God's voice again may take some time.

Be patient. There is a reason patience is a virtue! In the book of Daniel we hear the words of an apocalyptic visionary say “Blessed is the man who has patience and perseveres until the one thousand three hundred and thirty five days.”(DN 12:12) The visionary was addressing the hopelessness that confronted the Hebrew people in captivity but are not we captivated by our own hopelessness when we lose faith? Prayer can restore our faith but it will take time. Patience is required as we practice praying again. Patience is needed as we learn to again hear the voice of God in our lives

Change your environment. A change of environment can be just the thing to jumpstart a stalled prayer life. As you listen and consider God in your life consider the beauty of nature, the beauty of a sunrise, the beauty, dare I say it, in a snowflake! Many people find a sense of the sacred within the walls of a church. There is no question we recognize the real presence of God in each church tabernacle but how long has it been since you attended Eucharistic Adoration? Many churches today have ample opportunities to again experience this special devotion. Go. Sit, stand or kneel in front of the Blessed Sacrament and just feel the presence of a loving merciful God. Feel God's mercy and grace. Being surrounded by a sense of the sacred may be just what your prayer life needs right now. Light a candle,

kneel down and place yourself in the presence of the Lord. Do what it takes to become familiar again with ritual and devotion that may have been forgotten or that you have not practiced in a long, long time.

Limit Distractions. We live today in a world surrounded by competing events that all conspire to drive us to distraction. Try to limit those distractions. When was the last time you attended a daily Mass? You'll find things a little more relaxed, quiet and more serene at a daily Mass. You can find daily Masses most any time of day and in most any church from the city to the suburbs. Look beyond your own parish for a time that works for you. Commit to attending regular daily Mass and just allow sacramental grace imbue your soul. Soak up the peace, comfort and grace God so freely gives us. Let go and let God whisper quietly to you.

Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Now that we are in the season of Lent there are many opportunities to celebrate this sacrament. If you are embarrassed to confess your sins to a priest you know why not visit another parish? The grace from the Sacrament of Reconciliation is profound. The ability to give voice to sin will also help you put things in perspective. Remember to not only ask for forgiveness but for the grace to avoid the near occasion of sin. Sometimes starting with a clean slate helps jump start a stalled or difficult prayer life.

When God made us he did not make any mistakes. He gave us intellect; he gave us the capacity to feel emotion. He gave us the ability to make decisions. Think about the decisions you can make to once again to find prayer and in finding prayer find the rich blessing of faith. It is faith that leads us back from hopelessness and despair and prayer is the road to that faith.

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