

When life is turbulent, pray

When I board an airplane, I hope the flight will be safe and smooth. No matter how much I've flown, I'm nervous when the plane bounces around and the flight attendants are instructed to take a seat for the rest of the flight.

Some passengers take the turbulence in stride; others are openly frightened. Still others are equally frightened but try not to show it. I'm in this last category. It wouldn't do for a man wearing a Roman collar to get frantic. Instead, I discreetly pull out my rosary and ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to intercede for the pilot, the crew and the passengers (including myself). When the plane lands safely, I offer a prayer of thanksgiving.

Turbulence is an unwelcome experience, but it also serves a purpose. It reminds us that we really are flying 35,000 feet above the earth, and that's not without risk. As noted, turbulence is also good for one's prayer life. As a passenger, I'm in the pilot's hands, but I'm ultimately in God's hands: "Jesus, I trust in you!"

The unnerving ups and downs of turbulence also serve as a good metaphor for life itself. As we begin each day, we hope it will be productive and tranquil. We often pray for lives that are calm and undisturbed. Yet, as we utter such prayers, Scripture rings in our ears. In John's Gospel, the Lord says, "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16:33). Turbulence is not just part of life. It's part of our life of faith.

We experience turbulence in many ways, especially in this particularly turbulent time for the Church. The clergy sexual abuse crisis has shaken the faith of many. Some have stopped going to Sunday Mass; others have left the Church altogether. In the midst of this, what are we to do? Are we simply to grip the nearest pew and hold on tightly? Better yet, we need to pray for all we're worth. Clergy, including bishops, and laity alike also need to speak their minds about the scandals and do whatever they can to help the Church restore trust and continue its mission of faith, worship and service.

Some of the turbulence we experience is more personal. Sometimes, it's the result of

our own folly, as when we betray the trust of others or engage in self-destructive behaviors. But sometimes such turbulence is not of our own making. Life's journey can be rough due to illness, financial problems, unemployment, marital discord and controversy of all sorts.

In my life as a priest and bishop, I certainly experience spiritual turbulence. It's not that God's consolations and graces aren't abundant; it's not that the signs of his goodness are lacking. But sometimes the problems I encounter in my life and ministry are deeply distressing. They threaten my peace of mind and even my life of prayer. When that happens, sometimes all I can do is to repeat over and over again: "Jesus, I trust in you!"

Just as the airline passengers see turbulence as a bad thing, we usually recognize life's problems as bad. But turbulence in our Church and in our personal lives also serves a purpose. It reminds us that we are not fully in charge. It reminds us that we need to pray and express in faith our dependence upon God. It builds up perseverance. And it also reminds us of the need to change course, to take corrective actions, not looking for the smooth air of untroubled decadence, but rather for that pathway which leads through present trials to everlasting life. The wind, the air, for which we must look is none other than the Holy Spirit on whose wings we find our way our way to heaven.