

# Keeping strong during difficult times



Bishop Hying's Column

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These past months have been long and difficult. I pray often for the victims of COVID-19 and those who mourn them, heroic health care workers who give their all, political leaders faced with difficult choices, those suffering economic hardship and unemployment, the elderly and isolated, those who daily die from violence of all kinds, victims of hatred and prejudice, our priests, deacons, Religious, lay leaders, and faithful who all face their own crosses at this time.



The list of prayer intentions seems endless.

As we face enormous challenges on a daily basis with no clear end in sight, I want to give a word of encouragement and hope.

God has gained the victory for us in Christ!

The Lord Jesus will never abandon us; we may feel that He is asleep in the boat during the storm, but, if so, we must do what the Apostles instinctively did.

Wake Him up!

In His love for us, Christ never sleeps, but perhaps we need to wake Him up within us, that is to say, cultivate our spiritual life with greater passion and purpose, and realize that He will carry us through every cross and trial.

## Facing spiritual lethargy

Many of us have probably faced the noonday devil of spiritual lethargy in these difficult months.

Without ready access to the sacraments and parish life, living in isolation, disconnected from all that was familiar, we can easily fall into a mental and spiritual torpor, where nothing seems worth doing, our traditional practices of prayer bring no consolation and little seems to make a difference.

This interior fog can crush us, debilitate us, and leave us in a dark place of depression and even despair.

Couple that dynamic with the reality of the virus and the social and political conflicts in our country right now, and it may be tempting to just stay in bed.

In the face of such a seemingly intractable mountain, God calls us to go up and over.

I cannot fully change or control what is happening around me, but I do have control of my response.

I may feel powerless, but St. Paul reminds us that such moments contain a secret grace, when we hand our futility and weakness over to Christ, in whom we can do all things through His strength.

In his mystical classic, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St. John of the Cross uses the image of mountain climbing to articulate the dynamics of the spiritual path.

The further we ascend, the less green vegetation we can enjoy, the air is thinner, the path may feel lonelier, and our energies may seem dissipated.

But we are progressing!

I think of the spiritual life as a spiral staircase; at times, I feel I am going around in futile circles, but the Lord invites me to trust in His grace and goodness.

I often return to the same place liturgically, spiritually, emotionally, or in my prayer.

The place itself may feel like it was but I have hopefully changed.

More awareness of my own inadequacy or a deeper love for the Lord or a greater patience with others.

God carries us in every circumstance. Isaiah 46: 3-4 powerfully speaks of this truth.

## Being 'carried'

Before the modern popemobile, the Holy Father was carried by men of the papal court in a portable chair. The first papal action of the portly St. John XXIII was to double the salaries of those men, based on his greater weight in comparison to Pope Pius XII! They would have to work much harder.

In his spiritual autobiography, *Journal of a Soul*, the pope reflected on the experience of being carried through the crowd.

He likened it to the spiritual reality of being supported, lifted up, and carried by God Himself all through the journey of life.

When we feel at our wits end, incapable of going on, lost in futility, wondering what to do, we need to go to the Lord and repeatedly abandon ourselves to His merciful Divine Providence, trusting that He will carry us, but also realizing that we already possess many spiritual gifts to cultivate.

I encourage those who feel safe to attend Mass at their parishes to continue to do so prudently and carefully, while fully affirming that our elderly and those at risk should still be very cautious regarding public worship.

Please continue praying with livestreamed Masses if you are not able to be present at Mass at this time.

Be bold in the cultivation of your prayer life.

Meditation with the Scriptures, praying the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet, quiet time with the Lord before the Blessed Sacrament or in the stillness of your room, and spiritual reading are all wonderful ways to combat that spiritual lethargy that can really bring us down.

Reach out to family and friends. Let them know you are praying for them and thinking of them.

Please let me know if someone in your life who is isolated would appreciate a telephone call from me.

Conversation and connection bring joy to the spirit!

The Lord will continue to carry and sustain us through these challenging times.

We pray for healing, peace, justice, and reconciliation in our world, country, communities, the Church and our own hearts.

We ask the Lord to deliver us from all hatred and evil and show us what our part is in the building up of the kingdom of God.

On a daily basis, I entrust our diocese, our leaders, our people, and everyone living in our 11 counties to the love and power of the Sacred Heart.

The Lord will never abandon us!

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