





## REFLECTION

# As Public's Response To Pandemic Saps Inner Reserves, God Is With Me

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I am tired. I take that back: I am exhausted.

The past two years have been unlike anything I have ever experienced. Looking back, medical school was tough. My fellow classmates and I studied, worked together and got through it. Residency was tough. My fellow residents and I stuck together, held each other up. We helped one another out, graduated and found great practices in which to begin our vocations. Postpartum depression was tough. I leaned on my close friends who reassured me that my newborn son, Walt, would be an amazing kid even if he was formula fed — and they were right. The start of this pandemic was tough, and we banded together with our colleagues and stuck it out — we were even called heroes. Strangers said thank you. Patients sent in words of encouragement. Ongoing projects were put on the back burner to make room to manage all the intricacies of this pandemic.

Then, in late 2020, we had a vaccine. I had hope, and slept better the night of my first vaccination dose than I had in months. Finally, a way to protect my family and the people I love — and a way to stem the tide of this pandemic — was here. I could hold on a little longer. After all, I had weathered other storms, and I could weather this one, too. However, we all know what happened.

Suddenly, the world became a different place. It was honestly as if those folks outside my bubble had chosen to disregard this pandemic, to go about their lives as if COVID-19 was nothing more than the common cold. Patients who had trusted me for 20 years to deliver their babies, care for their grandparents who were dying of heart failure, and manage their depression and diabetes

suddenly lost confidence in me. They argued that they had “done their own research” and decided the vaccine wasn’t safe, that masking wasn’t effective or that their Type O negative blood would be protective enough against COVID.

Additionally, they chose to gather in groups for community events and fundraisers despite the prolonged wait in my own emergency room, as there were no beds available for patients in the state of Indiana. They spoke up at school board meetings, insisting that mask wearing should be up to the parents — not to the officials charged with ensuring safety in our schools — and certainly not to the physicians in the community. Furthermore, they attended Mass unmasked alongside my masked family, despite the low vac-

cination rate and climbing positivity rate in my home county. They chose to go to work when sick, knowingly exposing countless people to illness. These same people who disregarded my counseling on vaccination and minimizing exposure were the same ones to become angry with my staff if I wasn't able to provide care for them the same day they called in with their positive home COVID test result or arrange for them to have an infusion within a day, accusing us of not taking good care of them.

How did this happen? I kept up my part of the bargain — I had continued to come to my office every day with the intention of taking good care of as many people as possible, and suddenly I was no longer respected or trusted, much less appreciated. I am hurt. I am angry. I am no longer empathetic. I am distracted by this running tirade of judgment in my head when I should be engaged in the mystery of the Mass, or focusing on my daughter shooting a basket during a game or enjoying my son playing trumpet with his school's band. I have become fearful of being a part of that world. And now, I am truly exhausted.

A friend of mine recently challenged me to stop trying to figure it out, no longer attempting to make sense of a nonsensical situation, and to just accept it as it is. I stopped in my tracks when she said that to me. All my adult life I have assessed and figured it out in order to present a treatment plan, and now she says I need to just accept it "as is" and move on? Maybe there is some wisdom here. Perhaps, if I let go of the need to figure it out — the need to make sense of this nonsensical situation — I will stop giving so much of my energy to judgment. Perhaps I won't be so exhausted. After all, it takes a lot of energy to analyze and judge those things I just don't understand.

I recall the experience the disciples had right after Jesus was crucified. They were fearful. They were probably angry and hurt. They certainly had all sorts of things running through their heads. "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' ... And when he had said this, he breathed on them

and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" (John 20:19, 22) I am struck that they were not seeking out God, rather they were hiding away with fear. Despite this, Jesus sought them out, came into their midst and breathed on them the Holy Spirit. I know how the disciples were feeling in that moment.

As I think about this year ahead of me — really, ahead of us all — I recognize that it's OK to be angry, fearful, sad or tired on every level. It's not comfortable for me to be any of those things for any length of time; it's not who I usually am. I am accustomed to diagnosing and treating, even in my own experiences, figuring out how to fix something and then fixing it. Being in this uncomfortable state is exhausting. It has meant there is little left of me for my family, my coworkers or my patients. This limited ability to care for others has made me feel ineffective on every front — which further hurts me.

Giving myself the grace to simply be still in this uncomfortable place — to be huddled in this dark room — allows me a little rest. I'm not quite as spent now — which means I am more available for those who depend on me. I am reminding myself daily that this experience is unlike anything we've ever endured, whether alone or with our dearest friends and colleagues. I'm going to give myself the grace to just accept it as it is, and I'm going to give myself permission to stop the constant judging that I'm usually so quick to do. I might step back from a few things that really aren't healthy at this point in my life. Instead, I'm going to be gentle with myself, and I'm going to remember that even during moments when I am huddled behind locked doors with fear, confusion and worry, God will come to me.

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