

A Prayer for Restoration

KARLA KEPPEL, MA, MA

MISSION PROJECT COORDINATOR, THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION, ST. LOUIS

INTRODUCTION

As the season of COVID has continued to evolve, we have come to expect change like never before. Although change has always been constant, our tolerance for risk and unpredictability continues to stretch us to our limits, especially for health care workers and their patients.

As you reflect on your own capacity for change, thoughts of changes for the worse might first come to mind. Name the feelings that arise, respect their existence and let them glide past as you would watch a leaf float by in a stream. Next, consider any positive changes that come to mind. Again, name the feelings that arise. Appreciate their impact on you and your community. Then, let them pass.

For many, one significant change in this season of pandemic has been a realization of the necessity of caring for yourself and attending to your individual needs. As we next listen to scripture, consider the small ways you have learned to “withdraw to pray,” to take care of your own well-being, as Jesus’ example reminds us.

READING

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Now there was a man full of leprosy in one of the towns where he was; and when he saw Jesus, he fell prostrate, pleaded with him, and said, “Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.” Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do will it. Be made clean.” And the leprosy left him immediately. Then he ordered him not to tell anyone,

but “Go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them.”

The report about him spread all the more, and great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray. *The Gospel of the Lord. (Luke 5: 12-16)*

REFLECTION

“...but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray.”

Jesus knew well the importance of getting away to reconnect with himself and with God, even as great crowds assembled asking to be cured of their ailments. Some biblical translations of the word “pray” instead use the word “rest.” With this shift, we see more clearly how prayer can encompass so much more than an Our Father or a Hail Mary. Rather, prayer can refer to any activity which connects us to ourselves, to the Divine, and which also gives us peace. This can include silence, exercise or even preparing a meal for loved ones.

When speaking of the healing ministry, medical ethicist Dr. Daniel Sulmasy explains: “The work of healing will be diminished if it is allowed to fill up the day so completely that it crowds out any possibility that time might be set aside for both private and public moments of prayer. To neglect prayer is to undermine the basis by which an appreciation of the sanctity of healing is maintained: to reduce the work of practice to the application of dry bandages.”¹

When we are overwhelmed by

patients and by illness, it is easy for the work to be reduced to “the application of dry bandages” when we neglect holistic care for ourselves and others. Therefore, consider:

- What does prayer look like for you?
- How can you better incorporate moments of prayer or retreat into your daily life?
- Is there a word, phrase or action you can take that might remind you to “pause,” especially amid life’s busiest moments?

CLOSING PRAYER

As we conclude, let us pray together with the words of Isaiah, who reminds us of God’s strength and care for each of us, and how that love renews us:

The Lord is God from of old, creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary, and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny.

He gives power to the faint, abundant strength to the weak.

Though young men faint and grow weary, and youths stagger and fall,

They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles’ wings;

They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint. (*Isaiah 40: 28-31*)

Through Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

NOTE

1. Daniel P. Sulmasy, *The Healer’s Calling: A Spirituality for Physicians and Other Health Care Professionals* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997), 44.