

PRAYER IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

It happened long ago, but the memory is clear and present. My dear friend Betty, having lived with cancer for nearly five years, lay on her deathbed. She was peaceful. I was curious. “What is the most important thing you’ve learned about life?” I asked her. She looked at me, smiled, and with great clarity and conviction told me, “Life is simple. All there is is to be loved and to give love.”

There it was, the secret to a good life, in a few simple yet profound words. I have called upon that memory often when I lose my way. Betty was talking about the importance of *being* rather than doing and *being in relationship* rather than living in isolation. She was talking about the importance of a fundamental spirituality that gives meaning and purpose to life.

Even now, alone or lonely under the orders to “shelter in place” and “stay at home,” we are called to be in relationship with one another. We are asked to change almost everything that we are used to in order to protect one another. Do we, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 global crisis that has turned our lives upside down, sometimes miss the heart of the matter? Are we using our time, energy and skills to “do stuff” rather than to tend to life and to our relationship with God for the sake of being in relationship with others?

It takes time to tend the rose.

Each rose has its own particular needs and growth patterns.

Tending the rose calls for patience and trust.

*The beauty within is gradually revealed as the rose unfolds,
each new layer adding depth, color, fragrance,
and promise of yet more wonder within.*

It struggles splendidly toward its dying - its seed time.

The rose will not be forced; it answers to neither calendar nor deadline.

It follows the seasons inherent in its being and blooms in its own time.

*It is sensitive to its surroundings,
responsive to a healthy and nurturing environment,*

*while standing on its own and testifying to its uniqueness
simply by being what it is.*

*It adds to the beauty of the garden, in harmony with the shapes, sizes, colors, and
fragrances of the other flowers.*

And in the end, after the fullness of its bloom, it dies.

*The wind blows, blessing the earth with seeds holding the memory of the rose and the
promise of a new life and beauty to come.*

Tending the rose takes time.

We need to be cautious of an approach that relegates spiritual development to a narrow and familiar understanding of rituals and practices, sacred as they may be. How might a sense of mystery, wonder and awe be developed in our time and place of physical distancing? In these times how important it is to take an adult approach to living our spirituality as a faithful disciple within the Catholic tradition but without the sacramental gatherings that we so treasure! How do we continue to be immersed into the life and death of Jesus now risen and in our midst? How are we living lives of justice, love, peace, reconciliation, tenderness, and communion?

We must be willing to move beyond the teachings, signs and symbols of our profession of faith and honor the transforming action of the Spirit to touch minds and hearts and so to change lives as the Spirit wills. We must seriously engage questions that may open up new possibilities for conversion and faith by intentionally tending to spiritual growth and development within ourselves and our families. It may be easier to watch Mass on line than it is to take steps toward a deeper and richer way of living our faith in yet unimagined ways while “stuck at home.”

The first step in tending the sacred ground of spirituality is awareness. Opportunities for spiritual growth and development present themselves as often as the clock ticks. Every moment is full of possibility and potential, but presence to the moment is often lost in the flurry of planned activities and goals to be met. We need to become more aware of moments that call us into the kind of being and being in relationship that will deepen our heart-life and nourish our inner selves.

The second step is to respond to what is before us in the moment. It means putting aside our own agenda or goals in order to be in the presence of God and the other, open to the grace of the moment. It means devoting time, space and attention to the

present; in other words, it means simply *being* in the moment in order to be immersed in the fundamental meaning of life in the circumstances of this particular time and place.

The third step is an honest response before God to the reality of the moment. Imagine the difference this kind of “intentional attention” to what is present and real might make in how we experience the COVID-19 reality individually, as a family, and even as a physically separated but clearly interdependent global community.

In prayer, we say who in fact we are – not who we should be - nor who we wish we were - but who we are. In prayer, we journey more deeply into lives of being and being in relationship. And all the while, God IS with us!

Let us be. Let us be mindful. Let us pray.

+ Sister Miriam Malone, SNJM