

Teresa's Prayer and Covid 19 - Tracy O'Sullivan, O.Carm

Call to Acceptance



Covid 19 has unleashed unbelievable storms of insecurity that seemed beyond the realms of our imagination just a few months ago. We all have entered into a new world. Beyond the horror of the daily statistics of sickness and death, an inescapable anxiety drives us to question all our cherished standards of normality and security. We say it every day but that does not make it less true. We are in a new world.

*“Be not afraid,” or similar wording, appears
as a Scripture verse over three hundred times in the Bible.
It always reveals a sense of God’s caring presence.*

Teresa of Avila accepted this loving providence as the foundation of reality. It is the center of her message in her famous Bookmark Prayer. The prayer is an invitation into the mystery of God’s loving presence. It invites us to accept life as it is. For Teresa, an honest openness to life draws us into God’s love. Life is the greatest grace.

*May nothing disturb you.
Everything passes.
God alone never changes.
Patience can attain anything.
He who has God within lacks nothing.
God is enough!*

Any authentic response to Covid 19 demands we let go of our illusions of control. Letting go and letting God in a surrender of accepting our life situation is a

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centerpiece of Teresa's message. Most of us have a long way to go. Acceptance is much more of a goal than a reality. We need to continue the struggle.

This acceptance does not make us robots. We have responsibility to live life to its full potential. We do this by developing our talents, meeting our responsibilities, and enriching our relationships. We need to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving in all things. Soon enough we will run into the arbitrariness of life and dark side of reality beyond our control: sickness, inequality, prejudice, fractured relationships, and countless other dimensions of life. Covid 19 seems to have the ability to gather all our uncertainties and anxieties into one enormous package that awaits us each morning. We just cannot cut and paste to resolve the problem. Slowly, we learn that the difficulties of life are simply part of our common human experience. The issue is how we respond to these complications. This is the critical role of acceptance.

We all find ourselves somewhere on the journey. The unique challenge of this pandemic exposes our weakness. Our level of acceptance of our concrete reality, more often than not, is not up to the task. The beautiful prayer of Teresa vanishes into space in the storm of our apprehensions and fears. Letting go of the illusion of our control of reality is the challenge of Teresa's prayer.

Teresa's prayer is an invitation to get real, to be open to life in all its brokenness and limits, as well as its beauty and wonder. This is where we encounter God, not in the illusions and deceptions of our self-centered heart seeking to control reality.

Teresa's Prayer

Teresa experienced reality as immersed in God's loving mercy. She continually talked about herself as a world-class sinner. This was no make-believe world based on false humility. Her closeness to God brought a mystical light that illuminated her mind and heart. This led her to continuously talk of God's mercy and express the fact that her story was the story of this limitless forgiveness.

*May nothing disturb you.
May nothing make you afraid.
Everything passes.*

Teresa's life, on the surface, was worthy of a long-running soap opera that would run an episode each week for a decade.

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Her basic stance of surrender in willingness set her free. She had no trouble either proclaiming or living a life of acceptance in the midst of the turmoil. She knew:

*God alone never changes.
Patience can attain anything.
He who has God within lacks nothing.*

In the five steps of dying, one finally arrives at peaceful surrender in accepting the reality of death. In Teresa's prayer, we are called to the same acceptance. However, the acceptance is not of death but of life, even a life in the midst of a pandemic. No matter the circumstances, we can always say yes to life in peace. Any life eventually opens to death as a call to paradise. Our surrender to acceptance is the beginning of heaven here and now.

God is enough.

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For additional reflections by Fr. Tracy O'Sullivan, visit his personal blog at prayingalonetogether.blogspot.com



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