

FINDING *God* IN THE CORONAVIRUS

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"Stay home. Try not to go out. Stay healthy during this pandemic."

Suddenly, it feels like this is the new version of "Have a nice day!" What once seemed like a world away is now right in our own backyard. The coronavirus is very real, and is affecting everyday life as we see it. Schools are cancelled, businesses are shut down, grocery stores are limiting hours, colleges are ending semesters early, churches are cancelling Masses, there is no more toilet paper, food is being rationed, events are cancelled, people are working from home or are without a job, and it seems like our lives have come to a standstill.

I am currently a senior at a local Catholic high school, or, presently a stay-at-home senior. Although I work at a local grocery store, I have mainly been confined to my own house. I constantly wonder how much longer this pandemic will last, the lasting effects of it on my senior year, and finding God in the midst of all of this. Without school or Mass, times often get very depressing. I often sit in my room doing homework, cleaning, writing articles / poems / short stories, or making music. I can't go out and see my friends. My seemingly busy schedule has melted into nothing before my eyes. My senior year, the most memorable part of high school, seems to be slipping away from my eyes. Worst of all, I am confined. I love to hug my friends, hang out with them, volunteer to help others, go to Mass, or even just be out and about on a daily basis. However, the coronavirus has restricted all of that. For me, it is very hard to find a positive side to this. That is saying a lot as well because I am ordinarily a happy person. There are some nights when I am in my bed crying myself to sleep because I feel lonely and sad that the coronavirus has impacted my life this much.

So, I pose a couple of questions to everyone reading this today: WHERE IS GOD? WHY IS THIS CORONAVIRUS HAPPENING? HOW CAN THERE BE GOOD IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS CHAOS?

Honestly, there is no true answer to any of these questions. As humans, we can never understand the mind of God. I mean, think about it, how busy were we to the point where the coronavirus caused this much of a disruption to everything in our lives?

Well, first, God is very much present in the lives of you, me, and everyone experiencing the effects of this pandemic. We might not see Him, but God is always there. We can see Him in our cognizance of others, trying to keep ourselves safe so we don't endanger the lives of those we love. We can see Him in the kindness of shoppers at the grocery store, still continuing to help each other by speaking words of love or even following rations on food so there can be more food for others. We can see God in the people who work in the medical field, risking their own wellbeing and health to treat patients battling the coronavirus. We can see God in the grocery store cashiers and clerks, who also risk it all to help people in purchasing groceries. We can see God in the people afflicted with the coronavirus, recovering in quarantine so no one else gets sick. We can see God in our own families and friends, caring for one another and communicating with them to make sure everything is okay. We can see God online, in the stories of retired nurses heading out of their comfort zone and travelling to hospitals to work with patients who have the coronavirus. We can see God in the reversing effects of climate change because there is less pollution contaminating the atmosphere. We can see God in the priests of our dioceses, continuing to celebrate Mass even without a congregation present. We can see God in the Eucharist and in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to save us from sin. We can see God in so

many things. Even though most of us are confined to our homes, it does not mean that God is not there. Just because our lives are put on hold, it does not mean that God is not there. God is very much present in each and every one of us, whether we are reading this or not.

So, if God is here, even in the effects of the coronavirus, why is He allowing this to happen? As humans, we constantly ask why bad things happen. And to be honest, there is not a right answer. Remember, this is not the first time in history when a pandemic has affected the lives of millions of people, or even thousands. The Black Death during the medieval ages, the swine flu, and many other pandemics have swept through the world before us. God lets things happen because we are given free will. Sometimes, when temptations come our way or things happen in our lives, they become a test for all of us to continue our perseverance of our beliefs through faith. God does not like to see us suffer. In fact, when Jesus died, God was so upset, the curtain in the temple was torn in half, right up the middle. Jesus healed many who were suffering in their lives, and through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, we continue to see how suffering was never intended for us as humans. When God created Eden, Adam, and Eve, He sought to create a world of peace and good. However, once Original Sin entered the world, God could not prevent the consequences: suffering. Suffering can be good. Our modern society turns away from suffering as if it were an evil. Although suffering is difficult, it allows us to come closer to God and helps us to create closer relationships with our loved ones. Although the coronavirus has killed many people, it still poses a good that is beyond human comprehension. Only when we die will we be able to see any reasoning behind it.

So, the final question is: How can there be good in this pandemic. Well, for starters, we are already beginning to see an increase of kindness in our world as a result of the coronavirus. People are beginning to look out for others because they do not want to be a carrier to cause harm to someone who has a pre-existing condition or is older. Our lives might be put on hold, but it gives us the time to take a rare break from our lives and reflect on the direction they are going in. The effects give us an opportunity to pray more and realize the importance of God in our lives. The effects of this pandemic also provide us with an opportunity to get more creative and produce work that will soothe the soul. We can begin to delve more into our longing as humans to be connected, and understand the importance of friendships and relationships with others. It gives us the time to set our priorities straight, to fix relations in our own families, and come into communion with those experiencing the same loneliness and boredom that we are experiencing.

Just because we are unable to receive Jesus in the Eucharist does not mean that we cannot pray just the same. Many parishes are posting videos of the Mass online so they can reach their congregations. Eucharistic adoration is on a constant stream online as well so people can pray to Jesus through adoration. We can pray the rosary at home, pray with our families, and even get the opportunity that so many of us fail to find the time to do: listen to God. With all the commotion of the world, it is a rare and indispensable opportunity to listen to what God is trying to tell us for our lives. We can listen for direction in our lives, and have the opportunity to hear His word, not ours. This coronavirus poses threats to many, but give us new opportunities we might not have been able to experience in our day-to-day lives.

In this way, at least I intend to see the coronavirus as a blessing. Although it is difficult for me to find joy in missing my final couple of months of senior year, I believe that when we come out of this, all of us will find a way to develop our relationships with God and remember this time with a smile because of our faith. We must never forget that, although bad things happen, the most important thing is to never lose sight of our faith in Christ Jesus. This is and will continue to be a difficult time for me, you, and many of us. However, our faith keeps us alive, not worrying about the amount of toilet paper on the shelves of Walmart or Target.

May God continue to bless us and keep us safe throughout this coronavirus. May He send forth His will to all of us as we continue to battle through this virus and find hope and joy in the midst of it. And may Almighty God, creator and ultimate healer, continue to keep all of us safe and healthy. Amen.