**Praying through confusion and bewilderment**

With our normal routines and expectations overturned, many of us feel bewildered, lost, confused and anxious at the moment. It’s tempting to overlay those feelings with distractions like TV, or to numb out with overeating or drinking. But as persons of faith, we are invited to find God’s presence in every situation, including the Coronavirus lockdown, and to learn from it what God has to show us.

How can we do this? In the Spiritual Exercises, also known as the thirty-day retreat, Ignatius of Loyola gives a structured series of imaginative scripture meditations on the life of Christ. By the end of the third week, the retreatant has been engaging intensively with Christ’s Passion, with four or five hours of prescribed meditations a day, and is probably emotionally exhausted. Then comes the so-called Tomb Day, when there is nothing to do except share in the bewilderment and confusion of Jesus’ disciples as they come to terms with the fact that he has died and been buried. There are no prayer routines to hold on to, just a disorientating blankness.

Sounds familiar? I suggest that we can treat our extraordinary situation as a kind of Tomb Day, an extended Holy Saturday – and what a God-incidence that this terrible pandemic has just happened to come in Lent. For the disciples, the blankness of Holy Saturday was necessary for them to confront their own vulnerability and dependence on the grace of God; to let go of the hopes they had about how Jesus would bring in his kingdom, and wait for God to act. What can we learn from this ourselves?

* To look clearly at our inner responses and not brush them aside: to admit to feeling confused, bewildered, anxious, angry or whatever we do feel.
* To have the courage to hold those painful feelings present to our minds and accept that they are there. Like the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross, to stay with the pain and thereby turn it into a prayer we offer to God.
* To speak truthfully with God about what we experience, without feeling the pressure that ‘a good Christian should trust God more.’ We are where we are, and God can handle that. He loves us.
* To reassure ourselves that we are held safely in the everlasting arms. Overleaf is a collection of scripture verses that may be helpful.
* To ask God for what we need for today: God doesn’t need to be told but we need to ask; simply formulating a need is an expression of confidence in God’s care.
* To trust (or want to trust) that God is working powerfully through the faithful service of medical staff and others, and leading people to acts of neighbourly kindness. To look actively for good things that come out of this situation.
* To wait in trust and hope, and to pray constantly for a sense of the presence of Jesus Christ alongside us and the Holy Spirit in our hearts to strengthen and console. We know that the Resurrection is true; we too will be raised out of our present situation in God’s good time.
* To share our trust and hope with those around us and those who are lonely, through phone, Skype and however else we can.

God bless you and give you strength to come through this time of trial to the resurrection morning, strengthened in faith and hope and love.

**Verses of trust**

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| The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. | *Deut 33.27* |
| Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but stands fast for ever. As the hills stand about Jerusalem, so the Lord stands round about his people, from this time forth for evermore. | *Psalm 125.1-2* |
| But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother. | *Psalm 131.2* |
| Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. | *Isaiah 46.4* |
| See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands. | *Isaiah 49.16* |
| ‘Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.’ Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, ‘I do choose. Be made clean.’ | *Luke 5.12-13* |
| Even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid. | *Luke 12.7* |
| But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. | *Luke 15.20* |
| ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ | *Luke 23.34* |
| For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. | *John 3.16-17* |
| I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. | *John 10.14-15* |
| See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. | *Rev 21.3-4* |