**Living Our Faith in Lockdown**

**Ten Tips**

**Introduction**. We will never forget 2020! Covid19 has changed our lives.

Now we are discovering what “living with Covid” means: every day we are confronted with uncertainties. We are in lockdown again. Covid-19 has powerfully exposed the vulnerability that we all share. But looking to the past and wanting to return to what *was* is never a constructive mindset.

Faith cannot be quarantined. It has to be lived in the concrete circumstances of the time. So in this time of Covid-19, I would like to offer these ten simple tips as an encouragement to help our faith. With our movements curtailed, we have a chance to take a more contemplative approach to life. We can check on our spiritual health and ask ourselves: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?”

It needs to be said again that faith urges us to act responsibly in abiding by public health advice and regulations – keeping social distance, washing of hands, wearing a face covering, limiting our physical social interactions, etc.

 So, here are ten pointers I want to suggest for your encouragement to live faith in this time of Covid-19.

1. **Believe in God’s Love**. First things first! Remember God. Uncertainties, changes and restrictions easily lead to anxiety, fear and tension. Remember St. Peter’s advice to the First Christians: “Cast all your anxiety onto God, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). We are not alone. We are not orphans. We remember Christ’s parting words of encouragement to his disciples: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). It’s one thing to say it, it’s another to live it day by day. The sky above us is not closed. God is like the sun shining even when there are clouds.
2. **Slow Down and Look deeper.** Covid-19 has helped us all realise how busy and frantic life can be and that this is not good for us. It has helped many to recalibrate, to look deeper and begin again in our approach to life.

To look deeper is to go beyond the immediate and superficial. Can we slow down, “rest a while” with the Lord and adopt a more contemplative approach to life, be more aware of God’s action in our lives, of the needs of others, of nature around us? To be thankful for the gifts we have received in life is always a very good stepping-stone to a healthier faith and way of living.

So many people are suffering now and including those living in what is often called the developing world. It has been shocking during this Covid crisis to read statistics for example in Malawi there is one intensive care (ICU) bed for every one million people. We are thankful for agencies and charities such as Trócaire and World Missions Ireland.

1. **Live the Present Moment.**  We normally spend so much time revisiting the past or planning the dreams of the future, but easily ignore to focus on the present. St. Teresa of Lisieux used to say, “You know that to love you, Lord, I only have today.” The “sacrament of the present moment”, as it is sometimes called, brings with it a chance to believe in divine Providence by living each day, each moment, as a gift with its grace and strength of being able to see, hear and touch God’s closeness to us. Why not develop the practice of saying silently, “for you, Jesus” before each action during the day?
2. **Serve.** We appreciate in these days the ways people offer services that we really need but that we can often take for granted – from truck deliveries to shop assistants. We salute with gratitude all in healthcare and the essential services as well as priests, religious, school staff and parishioners who have given of themselves so generously in recent months. We can think, for instance, of the daily dinner deliveries by volunteers in local communities. The call to serve is for all of us. A pandemic could be a time when we are tempted to close the door on others and think exclusively of ourselves, but Christian faith prompts us rather to keep reaching out. The needs of the world don’t stop because of a pandemic, if anything they are amplified. So many have been affected physically, psychologically and economically, particularly those on the margins: migrants, refugees, prisoners, the bereaved. New avenues of solidarity are emerging, with new opportunities for volunteerism, as demands on charities like St Vincent de Paul, Simon, the Samaritans surge.

In his recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis speaks much of service and solidarity. He writes, ‘solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. When people serve others they learn to “set aside their own wishes and desires, their pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable… Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, “suffers” that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people’ (n. 115). However, we can’t do it all on our own. Pope Francis invites us to consider how we can serve others along with our sisters and brothers of our own church as well as those of other churches and indeed of other religions who also place themselves at the service of universal fraternity: “Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure… Dreams, on the other hand, are built together” (n. 8). Who can I help? Who can I join with to help others?

1. **Build Up your Family as a “domestic church”**. Everyone belongs to a family. Covid-19 has impacted on family life in all kinds of ways. While for some, it has brought awful tensions and challenges, for many it has also shown the importance of spending more quality time together. We have heard of whole families coming together, in a way they haven’t for years, to participate in Mass being transmitted on Television or online in one way or another. Some families set up small sacred spaces in their homes. Each of us is called to build up our family as a “domestic church”, a home church, a family church. And that doesn’t just mean prayers and rituals. It is about life in all its aspects. Families have learned to be creative in caring for one another from cooking to entertainment, from finance to education, from sport to communication. All of this is an experience of Church in a full sense, the “spiritual worship” of which St. Paul speaks in Romans 12. While there’s no such thing as a perfect family, through the love that family members have for one another, always starting again each time we fail, we contribute to letting Jesus’ presence be felt among us and this is the Church radiating Christ in our world. For helpful resources see…
2. **Mark Sunday in a Special Way**. Sunday has always been central in the life of Catholics. Gathering together for the Eucharist means so much to us. It goes to the heart of who we are as Church.

I know that we are unable to participate at Mass but we can still mark Sunday in some special way. We need to work at it. Thankfully we have access to liturgies on-line. Let’s do our best not to be too distracted when logging onto the parish webcam to get a Sunday Mass. It’s good to remember what we are doing - welcoming Jesus in spiritual communion. Other possibilities to mark Sunday include turning to the Sunday readings that we find online, and taking time to pray and sit with God’s word. Sunday is a special day also to think of doing some simple acts of love for those we know who are sick or alone. It might be an occasion to visit a cemetery to pray for our deceased loved ones.

1. **Small Daily Practices**. Faith needs to be nourished in small everyday little ways. For instance, saying simple morning, evening and night prayers and encouraging our children to do so. There are plenty of prayer resources on line. See also our own Diocesan website. When we build sacred moments into our lives, they become routine and supportive: grace before meals, blessing ourselves with holy water at a font by the door, the Angelus, a decade of the rosary during a car journey, a quiet word in thanksgiving for a beautiful day. Everyone needs to find his or her own way but prayer is vital – its grounds us, connects us to God, who lives deep within us, and to others around us; prayer strengthens us in life. It is good to find pockets of silence and stillness in our lives. It is certainly a big help to get into the habit of regularly saying “thanks” to God for the small and big blessings in our lives.

In recent months I’ve heard of people looking up online how to pray the Rosary as they want to do so with loved ones who are dying or in their homes or mortuaries alongside the deceased. Now could be a good time to rediscover this prayer that has sustained Catholics down through the centuries. It is a prayer that helps us meditate on the events of Jesus’ life that are central to our faith.

Here is the so-called Jesus prayer promoted by the Orthodox churches: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”.

1. **Tune into the Seasons**. The Church’s year is marked by seasons that bring focus to our faith life. It is good for us to be attuned to the liturgical seasons and feasts. October, for instance, is dedicated to Our Lady, so families often pray the Rosary together. It’s also the month when we focus on mission. November is traditionally a time for remembering our departed loved ones, for special prayers and liturgies and for visiting cemeteries. Advent begins on the last Sunday of November and runs through December bringing an atmosphere of expectation and preparation for Christmas. Christmas is the great season of celebrating the birth of Jesus, a time of focus on the crib set up in churches and in our homes. How we celebrate Christmas this year might be very different but Christmas itself can never be cancelled. So we can ask ourselves: how can we capture these seasons and themes in our homes?

**Discover the Word of God**. What a good time to reopen a Bible, to read again the words of God, expressed in human words and draw nourishment and strength. Why not take an hour or two to simply read one Gospel text from start to finish? Maybe you could find a passage you have always struggled with, then take time to consult an online commentary or reflection. Or simply sit with a parable or passage you like as well to see how it speaks to you differently in these different times. There is plenty of material online – exploring various texts, parables, passages, characters, etc., and guidance on different techniques for praying with scripture, such as *Lectio Divina*. You could always download a Bible app or a prayer app that might help. Many have made time during this pandemic to start a weekly discussion group, meeting online with a few friends to simply read and discuss a chosen passage. Wouldn’t this Autumn be a good time to discuss one book of the Bible or some religious text in an online Book Club format? The second chapter of Pope Francis new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, is dedicated to a wonderful reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan – well worth meditating.

1. **Make a Pilgrimage**. Pilgrimages are cherished events in the faith lives of Catholics. People go to Knock and Lourdes, Rome and the Camino to Santiago di Compostela. Such pilgrimages are not possible now but for something nearer home families could consider small family pilgrimages to local churches or holy sites. There are so many special sites in our Diocese – Ardmore, Mount Melleray, St. Patrick’s Well outside Clonmel, Holy Well of Mothel, Mt. Sion, the High Crosses of Aheny, etc. But every parish church is a sacred place. Perhaps parishes might create a Covid-19 pilgrimage shrine or sacred space in their local churches for people to visit. Most parish churches are and will remain open for private prayer, so it’s always good to pay an occasional visit for a few quiet moments. Just remember, we can never find time, we always have to make it! The first steps in setting out on pilgrimage are in our heart. We go with a desire to pray for ourselves, for those dear to us, for the needs of society and our world.

Our schools remain open, so new initiatives can be piloted. Perhaps it might be possible to arrange small pilgrimages to local churches or traditional sites for moments of prayer and reflection – mindful, of course, of guidelines on outdoor gatherings.

**Conclusion**

Christ’s message is one of hope; we hope for God’s promised kingdom in which all of creation will be gathered together in justice and peace. This hope transforms our lives and points us beyond the present world with all its challenges. His Gospel calls us to reengage, to inject hope into a pandemic-ravaged world, to be responsible for one another’s wellbeing, and to place our hope and trust in God.

I regularly put up material online and on Facebook. To finish I offer a prayer which often helps me. Maybe you will find it helpful too-

**Prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila**

Let nothing disturb you,

Let nothing frighten you,

All things are passing away:

God alone is changeless.

Patience obtains all things,

Who has God lacks nothing;

God alone suffices.

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For resources for many of these ten tips there are resources on our Diocesan Website [www.waterfordlismore.ie](http://www.waterfordlismore.ie).

**Other resources also available on the following;**

<https://pray-as-you-go.org/>

[www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)

[www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

[www.catholicireland.net](http://www.catholicireland.net)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVdGX3N-WIJ5nUvklBTNhAw> (Ascension Presents)

<https://thesacredpage.com/category/scripture-and-the-liturgy/> (Scripture and the Liturgy)

<https://www.franciscanfriars.com/poco-a-poco-podcast> (Podcast by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal for "Practical Spirituality)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=craeyJdrCsE&list=PLgn4viMGbbmDEw-R3MoYRYuRlmsgxd2A3> (The Chosen series on the life of Jesus)

**Children:**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3deRzmE_WU0dZiU6vNMY0A/videos> (Campa Mhuire Mháthair)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1n55tuJQCEn-1XO4-djqaA>(Little Way Sunday School)

**Young people:**

<https://youth2000.ie/home/gospel-reflections/> (Youth 2000 Gospel reflections)

<https://www.calledtomore.org> (Called to More)

**Women's Ministry:**

<https://blessedisshe.net> (Blessed is She)

<https://www.abidingtogetherpodcast.com> (Abiding Together Podcast)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTIYEolY2LvJSqzpFNBcn1w> (Emily Wilson)

**Parishes**

<https://ireland.alpha.org> (Alpha Ireland)

<https://www.sycamore.fm> (Sycamore)