



Some thoughts on self-care

There is much advice out there about self-care and wellbeing, it ranges from things like 'take a relaxing bubble bath' to 'set yourself a goal that pushes you; run an extra 10km'. I don't know about you but neither sound realistic nor helpful. Especially when I don't particularly like baths (the cleaning!) or running (too effortful!).

Also, what about my spiritual wellbeing? I believe perfect love casts out fear; but there is SO much fear and it's seeping in a bit, infecting my mind. And let's be honest there is quite a lot to be fearful of.

What will keep me well in my soul (even if my body may get sick), and how can I best live out my vocations (priest, wife, mother, neighbour) right now when all old routines and habits are not there to support or uphold me? I no longer must do the school run or the commute. There is no weekly delivery from the supermarket. There is no worship in church on a Sunday. There is no gym class on a Monday night. There is no lunch with a colleague at the coffee shop. There are no hugs or even handshakes. It's all a bit weird.

But it means we now question what keeps us safe, well and at peace. So, here are my top tips in case they are useful for you.

1. CREATE A STRUCTURE

Normal times for sleep and waking up. Regular mealtimes. Think about what you need to flourish; times of rest, work, exercise and fun. Prayer times. Maybe even set alerts on your phone. If, like me, you struggle with self-discipline arrange to call/video call a friend to pray with them virtually. Or book your exercise into your calendar like a firm appointment.

Structure and routine at best can help hold us in a calm place when all else feels anything but. But this may also be a time to relax our normal routines –

we don't need to be too stringent at this time! It could also be a time to release our spontaneity that other times don't allow. Think about what you need and then what is desirable and plan it out. Be realistic. And factor in leisure time and time to call your loved ones and neighbours. What is a healthy, holy rhythm for you and your household? And then if things get tough or fraught what will you compromise on first? What is in the desirable category not essential category?

2. P A C E

Please pace yourself; this is very much the proverbial marathon not a sprint. Leave yourself some energy for tomorrow, for yourself, for your loved ones. Saying 'no' or 'not yet' may be a good, holy answer. Equally so might saying 'yes' - discernment is the work of the Holy Spirit. Pray for this wisdom and strength to know how to respond. But if you end the day or the week and reflect, maybe ask yourself 'could I relive that time again every day for the rest of my working life?' if the answer is no, maybe you're stretching too far. Pace yourself.

And if you share your home with children help them to pace themselves too. I think children flourish with some structure (as above) but maybe question yourself as to whether you must entertain your school-out children every other minute of every day? Boredom is a great way of remembering that there are things we like doing we've forgotten about. That applies to adults too: what did we enjoy that we no longer have time for?

3. TAKE TIME OUT

Jesus did this plenty of times. If like me you get a bit sucked into the social media worm holes or endless news feeds, it can feel like my head just has too much stuff in it. The fear or panic takes hold. Turn off your devices. It's OK to mute the radio, turn off the newsfeed. In your structure or routine give heed and space to silence, inner silence as well as outer. We may not be able to control our environment to make everything quiet, but quietening our minds, leaning body and soul on Christ the Prince of Peace. Turn it off, breathe out and be still.

One of the techniques offered to people with any anxiety is to choose half an hour at the same time of day, write down all the anxieties and fears,

decide if there's anything to be done and if not, put them away. But, right now there are real fears for vulnerable family members, or for one's own health; then it can help to ask others to pray for them and us - a wise woman called it 'stretcher bearing', saying that at desperate times we need at least one person at each corner and that enables us to let go. Who are your stretcher bearers and who can you be a bearer for?

4. PRACTICE GRATITUDE

The fear of this crisis leads to the fear of scarcity as we have seen in our shops. What are you grateful for? What is giving you light and energy right now? Where are the sparks of love and the divine that you have seen this day? What have we taken for granted previously that today we are grateful for? Intentional gratitude leads us to a greater peace and a greater love for ourselves and our neighbours. From a place of thankfulness, we can serve and be served. I am thankful for Zoom, colleagues, tea and the lovely plum tree that I can see at the bottom of my garden that is pregnant with blossom. By the end of this, there will be fruit.

5. I AM ENOUGH

Yes, I am; even when I don't feel it, live it or believe it. God made me worthy; by his grace I bear his image. Whatever my fears, my worries, or my distinct ordinariness. I am enough because God's grace has loved me into being enough. At this time our own vulnerabilities are heightened - as well as our own frustrations. This is something I cannot fix or make better by my normal methods - I cannot work harder, I cannot spend more, I cannot fix it. Yet, I am enough. And so are you. We are enough; we are loved and wonderfully and fearfully made. Whatever we do in these days we do with God's extraordinary love and that is enough.

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.