

*Why Does Life have to be So Difficult?
Strength through Testing*

"Father, why does life have to be so difficult? Is God testing us?" When asked such questions, my response is never sufficient. Instead, I attempt to ascertain what is going on in the life of that person. In other words, what provokes the questions to be asked? We ask them in times of adversity; when all seems simply too much to bear. The current situation we are encountering, in regards to this pandemic, is certainly one of those times.

Are we being tested right now? Yes, but we are always being tested by the circumstances of life. In the process of such testing, we are equally being offered the opportunity to discover the depth and authenticity of our faith in God. Therefore, this current crisis, as difficult as it is, can be used to strengthen our faith and assist us in rediscovering that our ultimate hope in life is found in God.

What we experience in this life is temporary. We only have to look at how quickly the circumstances of life can change to realize again this foregone conclusion. The thousands that have already died, as a result of COVID-19; the hundreds of thousands that have become infected; the quickly diminishing economic and employment situations; and the vast grinding to a halt of our normal, daily routines testifies to this truth. What we profess though as Christians is belief in eternity with God.

It is always easier for us to believe in God, and to trust Him, when all is going well and we are content in our lives. When our relationships are strong, jobs and finances secure, health is good and we are at peace, we might even find ourselves turning less to God or perhaps even ignoring Him. When relationships though begin to falter, when children push their parents to the edge by the choices they make, when our jobs and financial security are in jeopardy and when the world confronts an invisible enemy, for which there is yet no known vaccine or cure, then faith can become much more difficult. We find ourselves asking, "Where is God in all of this? Is He testing us? Has God abandoned us?"

When life becomes difficult, and we find ourselves in situations of uncertainty and turmoil, we reach a crossroad, where a crucial decision has to be made. We will either trust that God will see us through the difficulty, and adhere to His guidance, or we take the road of fear and doubt and decide to go it alone. God recognizes that many of us desire a deeper faith. We want to trust, especially in times of uncertainty, and God wants us to know and to feel His love.

When times like these overwhelm our lives, and we feel we are being tested, God hears every prayer we utter. He is not punishing us. God is loving us through these difficult days and wants us to let Him take care of us. Just as the man cried out for Jesus to heal his son and wanted to believe it was possible, in the situation we are now experiencing we, too, want to believe that God will guide us through all of it. We, too, boldly proclaim the same words he spoke: "*I do believe, help my unbelief.*"

Let us continue to pray and to draw closer to Jesus, the source of all love. Saint Paul assures us that God hears our prayers: "*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?*" (Rom. 8:31). Life can be difficult and uncertain at times, but we can discover strength through testing. Remember, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Heb. 13:8).

My prayers are with you. I miss being with all of you at the Eucharist, but you are in my heart in every Mass I celebrate.

Father Gary