

From the Chaplaincy



COVID: CALL & MISSION

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Recent studies have revealed that (although it was obvious from the onset that it would lead to this) COVID-19 is taking on a new and heavy toll on young people's mental well-being. The lockdowns that have been globally imposed in many nations and communities have led many of the youth to the edge of anxiety and despair.

In the U.S. alone, "the symptoms of anxiety among the youth has tripled since a year ago. Americans aged 18 to 24 have seriously considered suicide during the pandemic as a result of the lockdown orders. The number of depressive disorders has grown four times

from what was reported in the second quarter of 2019" (Robert, Shannon, <http://mercatornet.com/a-quarter-of-young-americans-have-serious-mental-health-issues>, Accessed 19 Aug. 2020).

Our COVID conditions are undoubtedly a great challenge for today's youth. Their generation that highly draws sap from the digital world of the internet, is more susceptible to psychological setbacks and glitches. By being confined within their rooms, the young are more vulnerable to helplessness as they witness how the world around them seems to be spinning out of control and falling into hopelessness.

But despite this situation, young people can actually take advantage of the challenges that the pandemic imposes on them. They can actually overcome that sense of isolation or desolation they may feel from being “locked up” within their own homes and communities. And this is nothing new!

In the past, there have been countless individuals who experienced confinement and imprisonment resulting from war, political tyranny, and social unrest. Some examples of such icons of hope are **Maximillian Kolbe, Edith Stein, Viktor Frankl, François Xavier Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, Franz Jägerstätter, and Rupert Mayer**. Instead of succumbing to their dire inhumane conditions, these individuals became beacons of hope and consolation for those who suffered alongside them.

From these individuals and many others like them, we learn that trying conditions are not to be taken at face value -- that is, simply for *what they are* -- but as *how the better person* can come out of those same trying conditions. These icons of hope were not resigned to *imposed limits* of imprisonment, but rather they were *freed* by these very limits of imprisonment because it allowed them to discover a new relationship with God, with others, and with life itself.

They deeply reflected about their conditions, not in order to simply concoct a mental pill to sweeten their sufferings, but to find meaning and purpose in them. Their reflection matured through **prayer** and **selfless service**. For example, when Edith Stein arrived at Auschwitz witnesses saw her helping her fellow inmates with their belongings and propping up those who were weak. Maximillian Kolbe indeed suffered, but he never lost his hope as he prayed continuously during his solitary confinement.



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These souls were able to reveal that nothing in this world can imprison and erase the *image and likeness* that every man and woman has been endowed with by the Creator, and that this gift can even be made to shine forth by life's adversities.

The youth can benefit much from this kind of perspective on the challenges that life throws their way. It would be helpful if they, too, spend their confinement -- which has lesser inconveniences than the previous examples -- by discovering that COVID is both a *calling* and a *mission*. This discovery begins at the heart of their own homes when they assume the roles, they can uniquely play to help others in this journey.

Consideration of the following can help you make more sense of and find purpose in the difficulties you currently face:

- **Solitude and confinement** can help you discover personal prayer, and how you can become a strong spiritual support for others. For example, make a concrete list of people in your family, community, or school who you can pray for *daily*.
- **Temperance and sobriety** are nurtured when you start to value material things you have taken for granted. Through this challenging and unwanted experience, value the spiritual treasures offered by family, by friendship, and by sacrifice. Value *time* by being moderate with movies, video games, food, and even sleep.
- **Listen** to the rhythm and beat of realities you may not have paid much attention to before: the laughter of your siblings, the joke shared during a family meal, the stories about how mom and dad met, and similar instances that can make your self resonate with a sense of belonging.
- **Embrace** the others through your availability. Don't hide in your room or escape through social media. Allow yourself to be found. Allow yourself to be called and be present. Allow yourself to be embraced and be loved. Realize that COVID isn't going to last forever, but precious family memories of loved ones will.
- Remember that what will truly help you isn't so much *what you do for yourself*, but *how you can be made better by what you do for others* who are in conditions that may be far worse than yours.

COVID isn't only about survival. Rather, it is a mysterious portal through which we can discover a new call and a mission: that God -- in His inexplicable ways -- wishes us to truly become beacons of hope, of optimism, and of joy!

