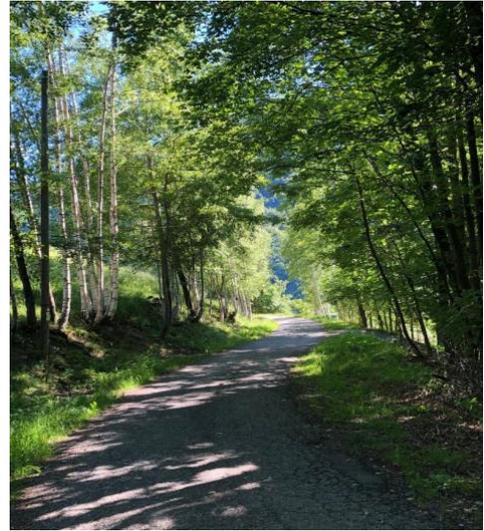




'Nurturing Resilience' - Focus on the Essential

By Archbishop Ian Ernest

In our life's journey, we come to learn that any crisis can be used as an eye-opener. Today, the world is facing an unprecedented tragedy that has put a halt to human activity. We feel distressed, confused and desperate, we are no longer running after things that we thought were giving a sense of purpose and satisfaction to our existence. But as time goes on, we come to realize that there are other things in life that need to be appreciated and new behaviours to be cultivated. The simple things of life, like gardening, cooking, contemplating the beauty of creation, and spending time with our children and our loved ones, could become the source of true happiness. We then come to note with sadness that the "businesses" of our lives have taken away part of what it means to be human. This situation is even more tragic than the pandemic, as it uncovers our pretense that all was well. But, this personal tragedy can be overturned if we use this crisis as an opportune time for reflection and discernment.



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If we are not ready to make this step, the prevailing unusual situation we are in can lead us to be passive individuals who wait on others to make things happen. The danger is that it can lead us to no longer believe in ourselves and to lose a sense of who we are. In the recent experience we have had during the lockdown, we struggled with an internal and external crisis, and many of us have surprised ourselves. There has been a sudden emergence of an urge to embark on a spiritual journey. For many, this aspect of one's life was neglected, as it was alien to a daily living focussed on satisfying one's needs and ambitions, which was perceived as a legitimate right.

This personal tragedy that we are all facing can in fact help us to know what we need to do, so that we can build up a new life. It never occurred to us that to build up and consolidate our living conditions, we must simply care for the gifts that life offers us.

The prevailing economic and sanitary conditions we are facing should not surprise us, for pandemics, conflicts and famine have been part and parcel of human history. Our memory seems to fail us. The courage and the great sense of creativity of our ancestors have helped in facing the odds of life and in overcoming fear and despair. Progress and development were brought about because they were focussed on what was essential. They created the opportunities to make the world a better place to live.

As we remember these models of resilience, it is important to face the prevailing crises with a vision that takes into account the need to be realistic and pragmatic. It is important to do so, as we do not yet know how long and how destructive the crises will be.

As we strive to turn the crises we face into opportunities, we need to look at our world with a caring concern. It is God's world. As we look at it, we see a world weakened by a pandemic and entangled in global poverty, alienation, environmental destruction, and corrupted devices. The potential for violence and marginalization is increasing.

A new approach to life is to be developed, as we need to respond creatively to the difficulties and challenges that we may face. By looking at the mess we are in today, we can no longer afford to cry over it because it is our responsibility to place our fears and hopelessness into a larger perspective that will give a greater sense of purpose to our lives. If a crisis is an eye-opener, it can help us in discerning what is essential and what is not.

As followers of Jesus, it would be our duty to know the mind of Jesus as regards the mess we are in. His words can help us in putting into place a new way of life that highlights the values he wishes us to adopt.

A few years ago, I had the privilege to visit the house where Mahatma Gandhi lived in Delhi. I was struck, while reading his statements on the walls of his house, by the extent to which the teachings of Jesus Christ shaped Gandhi's outlook and mission. In his autobiography, "The Story of My Experiments with Truth," the Mahatma wrote: "The New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart."

If we intend to face the crises of our time, Jesus expects us to live in ways that are clearly different from the popular culture around us. He calls on us to set aside the hypocrisy of the world and to have different priorities and different values.

The problem is not the world, for it was created and found good by God. He loves the world but grieves over the pattern of the world: the pattern of the world is the pattern of power, but the divine pattern is Love.

Focusing on the essential lays emphasis on the need for us to become servants of Justice. God calls us to unity and asks of us to do good and correct oppression. In the past decades, God has been used as an alibi for division and discrimination. But facing today's crises, let us create opportunities to bring into the world a spirit of resilience that can only be grounded in love, justice, truth, and compassion. Focusing on them will help in deepening human fellowship and promoting, what I will call, a loving concern for the other.

They will give us the strong desire to bring about what we hope for. Out of this desire come new ways of using our power to change the world according to God's will.