Columns
Coronavirus
Spirituality



One of the challenges of being COVID-positive is the psychological impact. Being isolated and confined have many emotional effects. The enemy is one's mind. (Unsplash/Kristopher Roller)



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December 9, 2020

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When we celebrated the Season of Creation back in September, Pope Francis picked up on the theme (Jubilee for the Earth) in his homily. He said jubilee is a sacred time to remember, return, rest, restore and rejoice. At that time, I had my own jubilee experience as I went through my COVID-19 experience.

I am uncertain where I got the coronavirus. It might have been during my travels by public transportation, going out in public places, or maybe from exposure to our neighbor friend with COVID-19 and I was not careful to observe health protocols. One thing I know, God had a purpose for this experience.

One meditation during my retreat — just a few days before I knew I had COVID-19 — was Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. I did the spiritual exercise of allowing Jesus to wash my feet. In my prayer time, I felt hesitant and uneasy letting myself be washed. I thought to myself, I can do it by myself. No need for Jesus to do it for me.

I remembered that during my isolation days. My retreat experience was concretized as my community sisters took care of all my needs and in a way "washed my feet." It was a humbling experience. I am forever grateful.

Our community decided to undergo the COVID-19 test when we learned our neighbor in contact with, tested positive. Some of our sisters had possible symptoms, and I had experienced mild headache, fatigue and low-grade fever, so we had two tests — the rapid test and the swab test. Our rapid test results came first, and all of us were negative. But three days later, our swab test results were out; everybody was negative except me.

On hearing the news, I shed a few tears and felt mixed emotions. Sister Elvia, my local superior, told me to stay in my room. Everything would be provided for me.

The doctor told us via tele-consultation that I should self-isolate and the rest of my sisters should quarantine, and we should coordinate with our local health unit. (At that time, home isolation was allowed provided one has her own restroom.) A few days after, I received a call from the health department and contact tracers, who also visited us.

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At times, it is easy to forget one's identity in God when focused on other labels. Focusing on the test result: "positive for SARS-CoV-2," makes us forget for a while who we are and dwell on the negatives of this illness. During my isolation days, I tried to plan my activities to keep healthy and take care of this body, a home that God created:

- bathed every morning
- prayed and attended online Mass
- exercised in my small room
- monitored my temperature daily
- took vitamins, ate well, drank lots of water
- learned online, read and wrote, sang
- connected with family and friends

However, some days I didn't feel like getting up. I wondered, "Why this happened when I observed all the health protocols? What if my sisters get the virus? How will I manage just staying in my room? Will my health deteriorate with this virus? If I am taken to the hospital or quarantine facility, will I come out alive?"

Those thoughts preoccupied my mind at times, though most of the time I tried to remember that I am created by God and he is the source of life and everything. Whatever may happen, it's all in his hands.

Jubilee is a time to return to the source of life, God when we wander away from our real home (forgetting that we can never survive, away from the source of everything). I realized in my isolation, without God, to whom else can I go? When you are physically isolated, you don't have anyone except yourself and God. Sometimes feelings of hopelessness and anxiety came, but then I remembered to come back to God, who is especially present in challenging times.

My experience of isolation also invited me to reconnect with myself, with people close to me, and with creation. I realized the importance of connecting with nature, looking out my window, breathing the fresh air, seeing the sky and green plants.

Since I am used to multitasking, it was a challenge for me to rest, stay put and slow down. Allowing others to take care of you is difficult when you are not used to it. My

sisters in the community took good care of me while I was in isolation — putting food and snacks, hot ginger tea, everything I needed — on a chair outside my room. And a private restroom! I couldn’t ask for more.

Thank God that my symptoms were mild. I had a low-grade fever for a few days, which I sponged off with tepid water. Phlegm in my throat was relieved by the hot ginger tea. I also had herb-infused steam inhalation.

My sisters in another community called me every evening for an online rosary via Messenger. I felt connected with them even in virtual prayer. Sisters, family members and friends sent prayers and messages, which helped me a lot.



(Unsplash/Miguel Bruna)

The isolation days allowed me to focus on the restoration of my health. The nourishment — physical and spiritual — helped me regain strength and energy. The second week I didn't have any fever, and I was eager to finish my isolation. The health department and barangay (village) health worker asked how I was and soon tagged me recovered, advising me to keep safe and continue to observe health protocols.

It is a blissful moment to recover from a dreaded virus! The time I came out of isolation was also the birthday of one of my community sisters; it was indeed a celebration.

Coming out from seclusion is something to be grateful for. It is worth celebrating. Knowing that you have met the challenge of being physically isolated, battled the unseen virus, and come out alive is indeed a blessing. However, nothing will be the same again; I learned many lessons from that experience.

Our life and our health are gifts that we often take for granted. I was reminded through my experience that God wants us to take care of our bodies. We are not in control of everything, but we can do our part in keeping ourselves healthy. Any imbalance in one area can affect the whole body. Connection with self, others, nature and especially with God are very vital in our life. We need one another and can't survive being disconnected.

Many people went through my experience and others even worse — experiencing loneliness, depression, sadness and many negative emotions triggered in isolation. It is not easy to be physically quarantined.

One thing for sure: We can overcome any challenge through God who strengthens us. Indeed, this COVID-19 experience has been my jubilee, an opportune time to remember, return, rest, restore and rejoice.

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