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NEWS FROM THE POLYTECHNIC COMMUNITY

One of Life's Deeper Journeys

Abraham was asked to undertake a long journey. He left Haran at God's command without knowing either where he was going or how he would reach his destination. He left his familiar zone and journeyed with uncertainties. Our journey through the pandemic was similar to his. It was an arduous journey in which we were not aware how to deal with the situation: unimaginable eventualities, unexpected experiences of loss, grief and pain, only trickles of consolation for some. These forced us, both as individuals and as a group, to change our outlook before this uncertain future staring at us. No doubt it required greater inner strength to look beyond just our own comforts and securities to the realities around us from which we could not turn away.



The first time we heard about the seriousness of the Corona virus was in January 2020. Most of the news coverage focused on the impact that the virus had in the city of Wuhan, China. It was not until late February 2020 that we became more aware of, more worried about this deadly virus and the quickness of its spread to many parts of the world. Then, the sudden announcement of an immediate lockdown in India completely changed the way life used to be, bringing a dark cloud over the season of spring, "the season of rebirth and rejuvenation." The signs of new life in the gardens, trees, plants and fields passed by largely unnoticed that year. Pleasing and enjoyable sounds of chirping, singing of birds, favourite among them the cuckoo, all brought little comfort to humans.



The sequence of events that took place in the following days and months greatly altered the landscape of the world around us with no guarantee that it would soon return to normal life. During the course of this journey we mastered

some new vocabulary, such as 'lockdown', 'social distancing', 'mask protocol', 'zoom meetings' etc.

Witnessing the journey of the mass exodus of migrants through rugged terrain surely was devastating for them as for those who watched helplessly. Indeed, such a movement of migrants reminded us the exodus of the Jewish people in the Old Testament. It opened our eyes to an invisible workforce in our cities. In spite of the mounting hardships they faced, with the help of some good Samaritans on the way, they trudged along smooth or rough byways. Their one goal was to reach home, be with their loved ones from whom they had been separated for many months.

The unexpected surge of this deadly disease made us aware of the very many people struggling to stay alive, to find ways to endure "stay at home" orders, struggling for the survival of friends and their families. Many watched the lives of loved ones ebbing away, their own world ripped apart as they watched the funeral pyres, listened to the cries of friends or strangers echoing from many quarters. The perished dreams of many, their nurtured ambitions, successes and failures, the twists and turns of the roads they had travelled, invited all to a deeper search for meaning in life. Deep silence pervaded the earth while loved ones watched the large orange-grey cloud rising from the cremation ground. Each one who turned homeward from the cremation ground was gripped by the reality that the human mind must bend in submission to God, the one who holds life and death in His hand.



As for our community, a few rscjs were subjected to a mild attack of the Covid virus. With sufficient care and attention they all came through and were back to normal. Our security staff who were far away from their families were well looked after during the most crucial period of the pandemic. The Director of Sophia Polytechnic, Sr. Anila, ensured the monthly salaries to the staff during the lockdown, especially the support staff many of whom entirely depend on this income. They expressed their deep gratitude for this timely help. Some of our employees could not go home during the lockdown months. Our gratitude goes to the Polytechnic warden, Sr. Joanna, who took thoughtful care of those who lived in our institutional quarters.

Our sisters, like Moses, stretched out hands, lent support through other voluntary groups and prayed daily for the suffering and the dying. We witnessed a tremendous rise in charitable acts in many ways to all in need. Young and old came to know better the pain, grief, the heartbreak of isolation and loneliness experienced by families, friends and senior citizens. Many of them must have longed for a firm hand to hold, for a word of reassurance, a forgiving embrace or a tender smile.

We realized along this journey a deep sense of gratitude to all front line workers, the undaunted spirit of service of the medical staff and care givers who risked their lives to save others. We have learnt to appreciate more all those who serve us daily in different capacities. Another lesson we have learnt is that our life is short and our road could end abruptly.

For many it has been a very hard journey, as they carry a load of fear, anxiety, pain and loss, and diminished economic prosperity ahead. Some have accepted the reality, and arrived at safety and peace. However, to continue this journey all need courage and, above all, greater inner strength. We live today under a cloud of uncertainty and doubt with the invisible virus floating around.

As for us religious gathered in God's name, during these past months we have discovered our hidden strengths and weaknesses. We have experienced the goodness and the generosity of others. We have gained deeper insight into the stark realities in the lives of others. We have learnt to accept situations without getting answers to all our questions. We need each other and are able to give to each other more than we often realize.

As we continue our journey:

".....Though I cannot see the end of me

I cannot turn away.

We have set our hearts for the way;

This journey is our destiny.

Let no one walk alone.

The journey makes us one."



Mary Varghese rscj

Reflecting over these past months, I see that they have been rather extraordinary, perhaps special. There are several things that keep me occupied in normal times, but this time being different what really captured my life is the Lord's power, for which I am deeply grateful. I was fortunate to have my work, which was a great help, as it kept me occupied; but there was a tremendous need of turning to the Lord and asking Him for his help and guidance.

Was I not afraid of getting the infection? I did not have to wait for the answer when three members in my community were struck with the infection, but God stood by me and spared me. I was afraid because of my age and co-morbidities. My fear increased as my brother Joe and other family members got the infection, but my faith seemed to grow stronger.

What I am faithful to this day are my Rosaries and the Divine Mercy Rosary. There was also the painful side of this illness. Many found it difficult to cope with the illness: families faced lack of space in the house, especially when going out was restricted; there was loss of jobs hence difficulty in meeting with expenses; education online was a challenge for those with a single mobile phone to cater to the needs of all in the



family; all this led to mental stress, causing irritability. It is difficult to give a real picture of the entire situation created by the pandemic. I would like to conclude with deep thanks to the Lord for His kindness and mercy.

Teresa Pereira rscj

Changing Frames

The lockdown that was imposed due to the global pandemic of Covid-19 brought with it many challenges and social restrictions. Life as we knew it suddenly ceased to exist; we were faced with fear, anxiety, uncertainty and a plethora of emotions with no clear guidelines of how to cope. As the months started rolling by, I felt called to reach out to students in some way. This gave birth to the idea of having a credit course to provide students with some resources to handle all that they were going through. I got in touch with Anil Thomas, an NLP therapist, who along with his associates offered their expertise free for this venture. In June 2020 we launched the online one-credit course on 'Covid times, Mythic Realities, Changing Frames - A practical course in Conceptual Psychology'. One hundred and forty five students participated in the course which has sessions on a variety of topics like empathy, gratitude, emotional management, cognitive errors and how to correct them. In addition to attending sessions, students were expected to maintain a reflective report on each session plus complete an assignment.

The overwhelming response to this one-credit course inspired us to consolidate this activity as the Department of Psychology of Sophia College's annual special credit course. This year, we held this online course in July 2021; the speakers and the topics covered changed but the overall focus remains the same. We have added a new perspective. It is said that the best way to learn is to teach, so the participants, who were around one hundred and forty this year, were divided into groups of around 10/12. Each of these groups prepared and presented a forty-five minute session on a given topic: effective study habits, how language defines reality, emotional management, mental health awareness, etc. The groups had to use all that they had learned in the course and include effective practical exercises/activities.



These presentations were arranged for various groups from non-Psychology backgrounds, such as the departments of Hindi, Political Science, the Science departments and the Junior College classes. These sessions were appreciated by the

recipients and the process of preparing and making these presentations has been an exciting and enriching experience for all the groups.

One of the many learnings from the pandemic has been on the importance of dealing with mental health issue, and I feel humbled by this effort which has contributed towards this larger purpose.

Patricia D'Souza rscj

I remember....the sudden lockdown and the panic that overwhelmed the whole world like a tsunami due to the threat of the Corona virus, almost one and a half year spent in fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Many lost their lives and livelihood. Students and teachers started working online. Life was completely a different experience. Daily, after the online mass we prayed for those affected by the Corona virus and for those who cared for them. I prayed constantly for my family, some of whom were nurses, who worked very closely with Covid patients in different hospitals. At the end, they were all safe and I thank God for taking care of them and protecting them.

In my own community three of us were down with the Corona virus. By the grace of God and the thoughtful care of the community we remained isolated in community and did not have to go to hospital. As the hospitals were getting filled with Covid patients, Sr. Anila, in consultation with her cousin who is a doctor, took great care of us during our isolation period. We were back to normal after three weeks or so.

I was able to meet the Sophia Nursery School teachers a few times when they came once a week to update their work for the online classes for the children. Even though there was fear to get out the house we were happy to meet and greet each other. Now that the Covid situation is better, children have started coming to the school. The Nursery School Principal, Sr. Charlotte, being innovative and conscientious, helped to create enthusiasm for parents and children to want to return to school.

Rosa Salve rscj