

2nd Sunday of Advent : Year B

Prayer in troubled times

Everyone I have encountered this previous week seems down, gloomy or anxious. What happens to our prayer when we are troubled?

Do we abandon our practice, reacting to what can seem like an absence of God? Are we angry with God for not coming to our aid, for not answering our prayers? Do we feel abandoned by God?

First of all, when we are troubled it is advised that we remain faithful to our commitment of time and space. We show up regardless of our feelings or reluctances.

Having shown up, which is after all the most important thing to do, what then? One suggestion is for you to close your eyes and pay attention to your breathing.

Don't change it just observe it. If you notice you are breathing then you are alive! Dwell on this for a while. Maybe think to yourself: "I am breathing, I am alive. I have life".

Stay with this moment for at least a full minute.

If strong feelings arise you could share these with God or you could stay deepening your awareness of your breath as your body rises with the in breath and falls with the out breath.

What I encountered in myself and others last week was a lowering of Hope. Lack of Hope is definitely a precursor of both depression and anxiety.

As Christians we have cause for hope when we contemplate the life of Jesus. He trusted His Father to the extent that He submitted to God's will and underwent a painful, humiliating death on the cross. Jesus knows all about our human suffering. Jesus' suffering was not His end. The Agony of the Cross was replaced by the glorious miracle of the Resurrection.

Maybe in prayer you could remember the good times in your life and realise that you have had things to be grateful for. Remember the troubled times, some even now, and ask God to be with you. See your troubles as time limited. There is an ebb and flow in our lives.

If you truly feel hopeless, that there is no peace for you, that your faith is disappearing, that you find it hard to love yourself or others, that this mood has lasted for two weeks plus and self-help measures have not helped, then please consider seeking professional help. There are many resources online for people experiencing loss of hope or overwhelming anxiety. You could visit [nhs.uk/better-health](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health) or one of the online or telephone charities offering support. You could contact your GP.

Breathing exercise based on the book "Finding God in the mess" J Deeds & B McManus SJ (2017).

There are many more apps available online to guide you through conscious breathing for relaxation.