

Corona Virus Nurse JD August 2020

In late August 2020 a priest friend of Fr Jonathan, called Fr Brendan, was on a zoom conference with high school students in Australia and New Zealand. This is the tale about Corona Virus Nurse JD,

The young people were involved in the Focolare movement and want to model their lives on the Gospel. I was to give a talk on 'God and Suffering,' but since I've spent most of my life falling asleep during talks, only waking up for the questions, I suggested that maybe they could ask a few questions and I could try to answer them as well as I could manage.

One of the young men put an unanswerable question: if some terrible suffering came my way, I could ask, 'Why me?' I knew another person I'll call JD was part of the zoom call too, who's a nurse on the frontline treating patients very seriously ill of covid. So I asked JD if could he tell us what he'd been going through these last few weeks.

"When I found out I got the Covid Virus, I was in complete shock and in the stage of massive denial. I always think the transmissibility of the virus within the ward from infected patient to a healthcare worker is slim to none since we invested heavily on Personal Protective Equipment. Because the hospital policy on infection control is so strict, the head nurses emphasize that getting the virus is nearly impossible. And I'm always careful with the correct donning and doffing of PPEs. Unfortunately, after 5 months of direct constant exposure to confirmed covid positive patients, I got infected. The hospital told me to be isolated in a hotel for 14 days and until the symptoms cease.

On my first week in the hotel, I was restless. I began to catastrophize the symptoms in my mind. The virus could probably warrant me a death sentence and I would only have weeks to live. My mind was in constant search of an acceptable logic to justify the reason of acquiring the virus. I began to doubt my clinical skillset, my intellectual capability as a healthcare professional. I started blaming myself for my failure. The thought process was more disturbing than the real respiratory symptoms of the disease and it scared me deep down.

Then I started to look up and ask God why has he allowed this to happen, of all the people, why me? I never missed a day of prayer asking for His protection and guidance. My family and many of my friends are also praying with me for my safety. I'm compassionate to my patients and give them what is due. I always go the extra mile of loving them because I see them as another Jesus who is suffering. Every time I enter a Covid positive room, I would think of the patient as another Jesus, suffering from cough and shortness of breath and I must provide for this Jesus the optimum care He deserves.

One time I had to do the post-mortem care for my deceased Covid patient and one of the staff told me to do it quickly to minimize contamination. But I thought this patient is somebody else's mother, or sister, or wife. What if that patient was my friend or my family? Regardless of their Covid status, the patient must be thoroughly cleaned and properly wrapped in a body bag. Although I was

exhausted when finished my shift that night, I felt I did the right thing and was able to sleep peacefully.

Sometimes, I overstayed with Covid patients for a chat. I should limit my exposure to 10 minutes in the room, but I often stayed for 20 minutes or more. You see, most of those with Covid enter a state of depression because of prolonged isolation and that no one's talking to them physically. Amidst all the good things and the good desires for the others, I was rewarded with a bug, and it is a deadly one.

I remember there was a strong moment when I questioned God's logic of why things happen contrary to what you asked? And sometimes, when you ask Him something or a favour, God responds with deafening silence. Then spiritual doubts start to consume your faith. What about God? Why has He permitted this to me? Where is He?"

God is love and full of mercy and that's a fact. He allows things to happen because He has a greater plan for us which our feeble mind cannot completely take in. The logic of God is inconceivable. It can never be levelled down to a mere human conception because simply, he is God. His reason is absolute love. And we never understand this because we only see it with our human reasoning. When Jesus was crucified and died on the cross, humanly you'd say, if God is the Father and Jesus is His Son, how could he be so heartless to allow His only Son to suffer and die on the cross? A Father letting His son die does not fit our human logic. It is unthinkable and unacceptable. But Jesus did not die on the cross for nothing, it's His death that caused our salvation. It's that divine plan of God that He wanted us to be reunited in his kingdom. God offers His Son to die because He has loved us, disdainful sinners, and He wanted us to be reconciled.

Now, did God permit me to get the virus even if, in my prayers I asked not to get it? Yes. Because His logic is far superior to what I asked. Because He loves me, He wanted me to be faithful. I may not see His plan clearly, maybe in the future I will, but He'd never give a trial that I could not handle."

Like Peter in the Gospel* JD started questioning why God could ask us to suffer, and surely with God's help he came to an answer. And even now I think JD, having 'lost' his life has found it.

** Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord;' he said, 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's.' (Mt 16: 21-23)*