

How to turn every problem into an opportunity?

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When we are faced with a problem we can stop, get discouraged and give up, or seek to transform our problems into opportunities on the example of Saint Joseph and our Lord Jesus.

How does Saint Joseph transform problems into opportunities?

In front of difficulties Saint Joseph does not give up but faces trials with courage and with faith.

Saint Joseph assumes his responsibilities **with courage**. He had the courage to assume the legal fatherhood of Jesus, which was a difficult situation at the time. Pope Francis emphasizes in his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* that this courage is not a resigned but a "creative" one. His courage is creative because he seeks solutions by adapting to new situations. When he arrived in Bethlehem and could not find a place for Mary to give birth, he set up a stable for Mary to give birth to Jesus. (Lk 2:6-7)

By his faith and trust in God, he assumes his responsibilities without necessarily trying to understand but always ready to accomplish the will of God. He trusts and does not hesitate to obey without questioning the difficulties he will have to face. Joseph, alerted in a dream of the imminent danger of Herod who wants to kill the child Jesus, organizes the flight to Egypt in the middle of the night: *"After they had left, suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt; and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.'* So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead." (Mt 2:13-15)

By transforming problems into opportunities, Saint Joseph allows God to realize his plan of salvation. *"The Gospel tells us that, what matters God always succeeds in saving provided we always have "the creative courage of the Carpenter of Nazareth who knows how to transform a problem into an opportunity always trusting Providence."* (Pope Francis, *Patris Corde* 5).

St. Joseph, with his fatherly heart, his creative courage and his faith will be a model for Jesus who also transforms difficulties into opportunities while doing the will of the Father.

How does Jesus transform problems into opportunities?

The gospels contain multiple stories where physical problems become spiritual opportunities for the Lord.

The death of a loved one is an opportunity for reflection and renewal, it makes us think about the meaning of life and what it should be; and when Jesus heard of the death of his dear cousin John he *"withdrew by boat to a lonely place where he could be by himself"* (Mt 14:12-13). Jesus spent time alone with God, praying and meditating on the Word of God. There is no doubt that this time spent with God gave Jesus the courage for his Passion. Jesus' death on the Cross is the most profound illustration of this principle. Indeed, the crucifixion of the Son of God (the worst thing ever) enabled the salvation of an innumerable multitude who will worship and reign with our Savior forever!

Physical illness is an opportunity for healing and spiritual growth. Jesus, *"as he stepped ashore, he saw a large crowd, and he took pity on them, and healed their sick"* (Mt 14:14). Jesus had the heart of God toward people in need because he was God, but also because he spent time with God... and the latter is something we can replicate. And even if we can't heal with a word like Jesus did, we can point the sick to the physical and spiritual healing described in St. James' epistle 5:14-16: *"Any one of you who is ill should send for the elders of the church, and they must anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him. The prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up again; and if he had committed any sins, he will be forgiven. So, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another to be cured; the heartfelt prayer of someone upright works very powerfully."* Thus, Jesus heals, but he doesn't just heal physical illness, he heals everything, he forgives sins, he renews life, and he brings about new birth.

Thus, when we are sick, we can experience Christ's love by asking for healing, trusting him for his answer, whatever it may be, and learning all we can through illness.

Failures are an opportunity for restoration and repentance.

"Noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord', he cried, 'save me.' Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith', he said,

'why did you doubt?' And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, *'Truly, you are the Son of God.'* (Mt 14:30-33)

Without his failure, Peter would never have cried out, *"Lord, save me"*. And if he had not sunk so low, he would not have seen the immediate love and compassion of Christ shown to a repentant sinner. It is an illustration of the saving faith that God grants to his chosen people: *"Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit."* (Epistle to the Ephesians 2:8-9)

Our trials and difficulties are opportunities to receive God's love and filled with this love we can in turn serve others with compassion and pray for their conversion just as we do in the Cell Groups.

How can we turn our problems into opportunities?

God can allow difficulties in our lives so that they can be transformed into opportunities to receive his love and mercy, to glorify his Son Jesus Christ in us and to make us grow in our relationship with Him and draw closer to Him.

This has been the case with **my spiritual journey**. From a very young age, I had an attraction for the Lord but my spiritual life was very irregular, a bit "à la carte" according to events. I was going through a lot of trials and difficulties and I had the impression of rowing in a boat where the sea was very agitated. Then I learned that I was seriously ill and I was devastated. After a short period of despair, I began to pray very intensely with all my heart, with all my soul and with a faith that I had not felt until then. I began to pray, like Jesus in the Bible, with the psalms. I also prayed the Rosary and I made a Novena to Mary who undo the Knots. I felt many graces: knots that had been there for a long time were suddenly untied, I received a lot of love and signs that I was going to be healed, I felt it deeply inside me. There follows a calmness that I had never experienced before. The doctors did not understand this serenity and told me that it was very unusual. I had put my life in the hands of the Lord and I let him guide me under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, I trusted him. I then regained my health and resumed the course of my life but praying more and regularly. I then noticed that I was still in the boat but that I was rowing with Jesus at my side on a calm sea, and no longer against the current. There are still some trials but I feel an inner strength and peace that allows me to face them with serenity and confidence. I am finally much happier. Psalm 116 describes exactly how I feel:

*"The bonds of death were all around me,
And the snares of Sheol held me fast;
Distress and anguish held me in their grip,
But I called on the name of the Yahweh ...
... when I brought low he gave me strength" (Ps 116)*

Strengthened by this trial and aware that faith is to be shared, I decided to join a cell group to continue to grow in prayer and share Jesus with others.

Praying in a cell group is a wonderful opportunity to praise and invoke the Holy Spirit to transform the problems of all its members. It is an opportunity to ask the Holy Spirit in faith to enlighten us and enable us to find ways to move forward and overcome problems for the glory of God.

The Holy Spirit can give us opportunities to witness the help received from the Lord to cell group members in difficulty. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and the God who gives every possible encouragement; he supports us in every hardship, so that we are able to come to the support of others, in every hardship of theirs because of the encouragement that we ourselves receive from God."* (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

During this period of confinement, it was not always possible for all of us to gather in person to pray in the cell group. We had to be creative and renew ourselves. This has been an opportunity to develop our use of new technologies to allow us to meet through video conferencing. It has also allowed us in our parish in Paris (Saint Pierre du Gros Caillou) to meet during the Lenten season not in cells but in "Trio". The idea was to form mini-teams of three people by inviting a relative or a neighbor and to gather every week to discover Jesus Christ and the experience of fraternal charity. This "Trio" experience was a beautiful opportunity to create new cells.

As a referent for Lebanon I wish to conclude this presentation by asking you to pray for my dear country, which is going through a serious and unprecedented crisis, that it may take the opportunity to face and overcome this so tragic and painful moment without being discouraged. Let us pray that the emerging cells in Lebanon will allow the country to rise from its ashes keeping its eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph and to embrace the hope of the Kingdom of God with a fervent faith.

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