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## INTRODUCTION

**W**hen news of the COVID-19 pandemic reached me here in Seattle, I began to write prayers. I would turn the phrases of them over in my head as I washed dishes or folded laundry or took my kids for walks. None of us knew then what was ahead, and in many ways we still don't. There are so many unknowns. And yet I wanted to find a way to make an offering to God out of this strange and difficult time. As I shared these prayers and found that they resonated deeply with others, I kept writing, kept searching my heart for the words to melt the hard metal of these tragic days into prayer. We have lost so many. So many have suffered tremendously. So many are frightened of an unknown future. There are endless prayers to be carried to the throne of God.

As I wrote, I was filled with hope that even though we are isolated from each other, we might still find ways to care for each other and to make the deliberate choice to respond to this crisis with love instead of fear—to take up the simple yet radical call of the gospel, to love God and to love each other.

I also became more convinced than I ever have been that Jesus is here with us, that he sees our suffering and cares deeply about our sorrows. I hope in these prayers to build a bridge between Jerusalem 2,000 years ago and the here and now, where we face a pandemic more frightening than anything we have ever seen. Every day I read the news and then bring it, arms brimming over with tales of loss and grief, to Jesus. I don't believe there is a single word of it that leaves him unmoved.

The prayers in this collection have been born of a deep conviction that there is no emotion we cannot bring to God, and no place we cannot experience his embrace. The title of this collection comes from an address given on a rainy evening in the empty echo of St. Peter's Square. Pope Francis prayed that night in his "Urbi et Orbi" blessing that even in the midst of these darkest days we would feel the consoling embrace of God. It is my hope that these prayers lead you there, and that they spur you on in carrying your own burdens, your hopes, and your fears directly to God's welcoming arms. May we all, through his great mercy, feel how tenderly we are held.

## Prayer for a Pandemic

May we who are merely inconvenienced  
remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors  
remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home  
remember those who must choose  
between preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children  
when their schools close  
remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips  
remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult  
of the economic market  
remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home  
remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country,  
let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms  
around each other,

let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

AMEN.

# Prayer for Healthcare Workers

Angels in blue gowns,  
they wear face masks instead of haloes.  
Their gloved holy hands administer to us  
care we are too weak to provide for ourselves.

Without sleep,  
without hope of a day off,  
in the face of ever-dwindling supplies,  
they risk their lives at every moment  
in order to save ours.

Blessed are the hands,  
rubbed raw from washing,  
that connect us to ventilators.

Blessed are the feet,  
sore and swollen,  
that tread the ER floors.

Blessed are the eyes  
that have stared down death  
hundreds,  
thousands of times,  
and yet look upon each desperately ill patient  
and refuse to give up hope.

God most merciful,  
preserve the health and safety  
of those who work so hard to preserve ours.

AMEN.

# Prayer for All Who Have Lost Work

Work heartily, as unto the Lord,

Paul tells us.

But what about all of us

who have lost our work,

our sense of security,

our ability to provide for our families,

our dignity?

That terror is so real,

as real as standing at the edge of a cliff.

Where will we find provision?

How will we spend our days?

Work heartily, as unto the Lord.

Paul wrote those words

while under house arrest.

As we wait for employment,

for relief,

for hope itself,

may we be confident that many have gone before us,

and that there is One who sits beside us,

his heart entwined with ours,

Worrying.

Waiting.

God most compassionate,

send work to all who need it.

AMEN.

# Prayer for All Who Have Lost Homes

Home.

The beating heart of the family.

The dwelling place of safety.

Even just saying the word  
brings a palpable sense of comfort.

But so many of us are enduring  
the pain of goodbyes  
to the walls that cradled us,  
the fear of the unknown future.

Where will we lay our heads?

When Jesus spoke about home,  
the word he used meant not only a physical structure,  
but also the entire household—  
the people who transformed bricks and boards  
into a place of warmth and welcome.

As so many of us lose our lodging,  
may we find that our households  
are miraculously expanding,  
as friends, neighbors, perfect strangers  
come together to help us rebuild.

AMEN.



# Prayer for Parents Doing Essential Work

Children don't understand  
why they can't see mom and dad,  
except on a screen.

They only understand  
that they seem far away.

And they are far away indeed—  
in masks and gloves and gowns  
in another world  
where a disease reigns supreme and vicious,  
ever grasping for more territory.

Brave and self-sacrificing parents,  
we wish that we could give you back  
this time you have missed with your children,  
this time when you were scrubbing hospitals  
or caring for the elderly  
or prone positioning patients  
who were drowning in their own bodies.

God of restoration, God who longs to gather us together,  
draw near to parents and children  
separated by walls and windows.

Unite their hearts,  
even while their bodies are separated.

AMEN.



After completing her Ph.D. in Russian literature at UC Berkeley, Cameron Bellm traded academics for the contemplative life, informed by Ignatian spirituality and Catholic social teaching. The Seattle-based writer and her husband have two young sons and she seeks each day to find God in all things, most frequently in Legos and microwaved coffee.

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The prayer “Prayer of Grief and Gratitude” on page 28 originally appeared on the website of the Jesuit Conference (Jesuits.org).

TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS, a Division of Bayard, Inc.;  
One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200, New London, CT 06320;  
(860) 437-3012 or (800) 321-0411; [www.twentythirdpublications.com](http://www.twentythirdpublications.com).