

Peace amidst the storm



FOREWORD

Table of plenty is a collection of zines dedicated to bringing God's love and truth to all of its readers. This collection aims to engage readers by allowing them to journey through testimonies, reflections, and illustrations contributed by individuals united in Christ. Born from a desire to inspire new and deeper encounters through a creative platform, ToP hopes to be a beacon of light, drawing readers closer to the One who calls them beloved.



CHRIST AT THE CENTER

BY MARCELLA CHUA

Dear friend,

As I sit here reflecting on what to write for this letter, I struggle to find the words to lend coherence to what I desire to express. A mess of apparent paradoxes and only patches of a larger picture, it seems that everything relates in some overwhelming complexity beyond any hope of comprehension. And yet, upon further reflection, the Lord whispers gently but surely that everything finds perfect coherence in him.

In light of this truth, I am reminded of an analogy that a sister-in-Christ gave in her testimony for a retreat using the concepts of geocentrism (where the sun, moon, stars, and planets orbit the earth) and heliocentrism (where the earth, moon, stars, and planets orbit the sun instead). With earth signifying us and the sun signifying Jesus (the Son!), she explained that the orbits of astronomical bodies in the geocentric model were messy and irreconcilable while that of the heliocentric model were found to be nice circles and ellipses. In short, unless we put God at the center of everything, nothing will make sense.

Likewise, the storms in our lives will remain messy if we fail to orientate ourselves to the eye of the storm—Jesus. In the past few months, I found myself oscillating between periods of highs and lows, feeling everything one moment and nothing the next. As I tried to map my journey in this season, I was amused at the seeming lack of rhyme or reason and wondered if something went wrong along the way. Yet, as I continued to ask Jesus about it, He opened my eyes to see that each twist and turn were opportunities to exercise the gift of peace that He was giving me. In retrospect, I realized that although there were so many times I felt restless and helpless, there was a peace that lingered independently of what I felt or thought.

The peace that I had experienced was not solely calmness or quietude or stillness. It was the knowledge of where my reference point was, where to go home to, and knowing that I could. Only by the grace of God did I manage to re-center again and again on Jesus and to keep Him in my heart when the human side of me told myself that it was illogical to do so. There were no answers, no evident consolation, and no end in sight. Yet, nothing could touch the truth that Jesus is Lord, that He is present, and that all will be good in His hands.

In whatever storm we may find ourselves in today, may we not forget to receive into our spirit the truth that all things find their place in God. In Psalm 85:8 it says, "I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants." The Lord surrounds us daily with reminders of His love for us: in people, in moments, maybe even in the very storms we are in. May we never be too busy fighting battles on our own to let God hold us and reassure us of His sovereignty in our lives. Even in this very moment, He invites us to hear him rejoice over us and tell us that He has got things under control.

Dear friend, I pray that as you read this, the Lord will bless you with a peace that makes no sense to the world, for you were made for Heaven. May you resolutely and fervently proclaim the truths of who God is over any and every event in your life. The Lord goes before you always and will never lead you where He will not be. You are secure in Him and His attention is on you at every moment. May you take heart and protect the seed of faith planted in you, for only in Jesus can we stand firm and receive the peace He has ordained for us. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:13).

***PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU; MY
PEACE I GIVE YOU. I DO NOT
GIVE TO YOU AS THE WORLD
GIVES. DO NOT LET YOUR
HEARTS BE TROUBLED AND
DO NOT BE AFRAID.***

JN 14:27

PSALM OF THE DESERT

BY JOSHUA TAN

*O Lord my God,
again, I lose sight of you.
One moment, I behold you.
In the next, I am enshrouded in darkness,
overwhelmed by the unending deluge of my own thoughts.
Images dance before me,
terrible voices speak to me, tug at my heart, shake me, prod me,
and your face, once again, is hidden from me.*

*Lord, why do my eyes fail?
Why do other voices speak louder than yours?
Why do you let me be taken by them?*

*Shroud me in your presence again O Lord.
Lay me down in the shade of your branches,
Within your peace that no earthly power can penetrate.
I want to be submerged in your love only,
To dance the dance of life with you,
To listen to your gentle voice.*

*Lord, you are my refuge. In you, with you, I rest.
You are not hiding from me.
I know that you want me with you more than I can want to be with you.
I await your rescue.*

*LORD,
YOU ARE
MY
REFUGE.*



A LORD WHO FIGHTS FOR ME

BY JOSEPH FERNANDEZ

“YOU HAVE TO FIGHT IN ORDER TO SURVIVE”

This was the tagline for one of my favourite TV shows as a kid. It also sums up how I felt as both a Catholic and as a leader of the community at Yale-NUS. Being surrounded by many non-Catholics who question my faith, sometimes aggressively so, painted an image in my mind of me being a soldier holding the fort at the very frontiers of the Church's mission. It also, unfortunately, led to many times when the voice of the Evil One would come and try to cast despair upon my heart, trying to tempt me to believe that (a) the mission on campus was fruitless as many people were rejecting the Gospel, even some of our lapsed Catholics, and (b) that this made me less loveable in the eyes of the Lord.

And so, entering CUR 2019, at about the halfway point in my term, I was a mess. I was constantly trying to prove my worth to the Lord, instead of simply accepting His love. I was trying to earn my own salvation, rather than receiving it as free gift. Also, just before CUR, I was serving at my parish's Sec 3 retreat, where I came face to face with the limits of my human strength. So, being both physically and spiritually exhausted, I was ready to treat this CUR as but one more retreat.

However, the Lord, being ever faithful, had much more than just another retreat experience for me. Even though I was a Service Team member, from Day 1 He had much for me to receive. At the first night session, after the participants had experienced prayer ministry, the sessionist suddenly announced that the Service Team would also be prayer for by the OYP staff. Fr. Jude then came up to me, gave me a hug and whispered in my ear, “God does not leave you at the peripheries of the Kingdom. Even as you desire to put His Kingdom at the centre of your life, He desires to bring you into the centre of His Kingdom.” Honestly, standing next to the speaker, I couldn't really hear every word he said, but somehow that exact line rang clearly in my ears and stayed with me throughout the next few days.

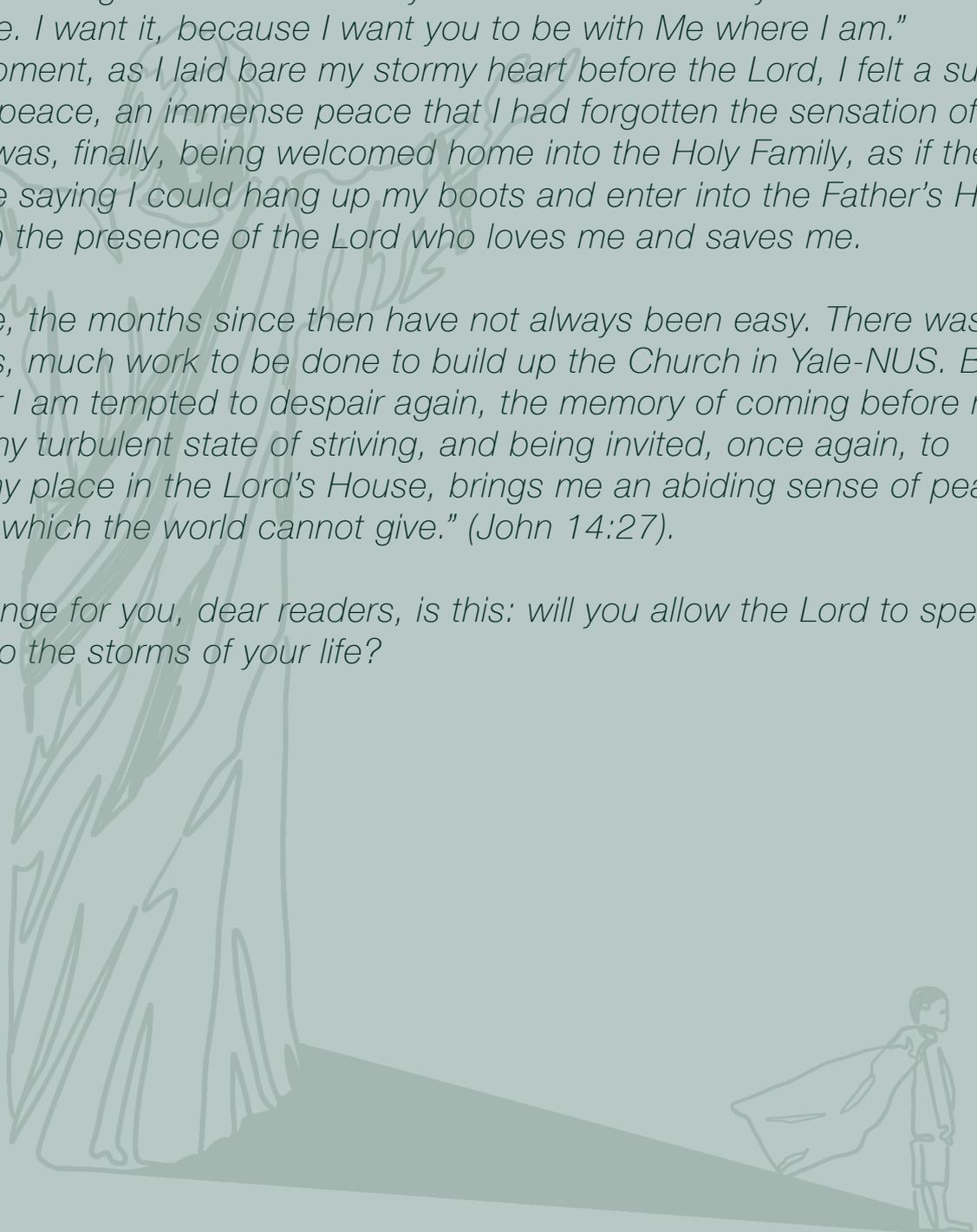
The next day, I would constantly come back to that line in prayer. God, what do you mean by bringing me into the centre of Your Kingdom? There is still much work to be done on the peripheries! After all, the mission is far from over for me!

But, as usual, God was not done. On Night 2, we had a paraliturgy where we were invited to prostrate fully before the Holy Family. As I approached and laid face-down on the carpet, in my mind I was thinking: Lord, what else can I offer you? I have served you in this community and have nothing to show for it, except for all the times of rejection and failure.

And through the darkness of the storm in my heart, the Lord spoke: "That's more than enough for me. Give me your failures. Give me your wounds. Give it all to me. I want it, because I want you to be with Me where I am." In that moment, as I laid bare my stormy heart before the Lord, I felt a sudden sense of peace, an immense peace that I had forgotten the sensation of. It felt like I was, finally, being welcomed home into the Holy Family, as if the Lord were saying I could hang up my boots and enter into the Father's House to bask in the presence of the Lord who loves me and saves me.

Of course, the months since then have not always been easy. There was, and still is, much work to be done to build up the Church in Yale-NUS. But whenever I am tempted to despair again, the memory of coming before my Lord, in my turbulent state of striving, and being invited, once again, to reclaim my place in the Lord's House, brings me an abiding sense of peace, "a peace which the world cannot give." (John 14:27).

My challenge for you, dear readers, is this: will you allow the Lord to speak peace into the storms of your life?



Recommendations

Activity:

Set aside some time to prayerfully listen to the song 'Peace, be still' by The Belonging Co. Adopt a position of prayerful openness, what emotions does this song evoke within you? Do any images or words come to mind? How do you feel listening to the lyrics?

We invite you to pen these thoughts down in your journal. You may even wish to express these creatively – art, song, dance, and more.

Songs:

Another In The Fire- Hillsong UNITED

Oh My Soul – Casting Crowns

Into Faith I go – Pat Barrett

Books:

Five loaves and Two Fishes – Venerable

Cardinal Francis Xavier

Searching for and Maintaining Peace

– Fr Jacques Phillippe