



### **GATHER AND OPENING PRAYER**

Play a recording of "Be Not Afraid" by Bob Dufford, or "On Eagle's Wings" by Michael Joncas, or another song related to the topic.

O God, Father, every day we hear about so many traumatic events: natural disasters, storms, disease, war, terrorism, crime. Life seems to be full of uncertainty and danger, and we have all been affected in some way. We worry about our families. How will we keep them safe; how will we prevent them from giving in to fear? Yet we know you are calling us to bring a message of love to our world. Help us to face our insecurities with hope in your providence. We ask this in the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### **REPORT ON ACTIONS**

### **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION**

A reading from the Book of Psalms.

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

—Psalm 91:1-6

A Reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

- What is the image of God revealed by these readings?
- What is needed for one to be at peace and have no fear?
- “Pestilence” in Psalm 91 means contagious disease. For many of us in the developed world, fear of contagious disease seemed like a thing of the past until the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and now COVID-19. Do you think Psalm 91 is a promise that followers of God won’t get severely sick from this sort of disease? How do you understand what the Psalmist is saying?

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

Fears may develop rapidly after a traumatic event. After the initial feelings of shock and numbness wear off, some people find that they are still having trouble resuming daily life because of lingering fear.

Fears may revolve around activities directly related to the traumatic event, or they could be about something you have read, heard, or even imagined about the event. Fears can also be related to a resurgence of painful feelings from a past trauma or loss that is triggered by the current situation. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, some people may have difficulty:

- Allowing a family member or loved one to fly
- Going to stay in a senior living facility
- Traveling on a cruise ship
- Traveling cross country by car
- Eating or working in a restaurant
- Returning to work
- Taking children to visit grandparents
- Being in large groups of people
- Leaving home
- Going to the hospital or emergency room, even in an emergency
- Getting, or allowing loved ones to get, a vaccine

To some people, these fears are entirely justified given the ongoing risk of infection. Other people dismiss such fears. Disagreement among family members about the precautions that should be taken around the virus was and continues to be a source of tension. This disagreement is also played out in the larger society.

It’s normal to experience these fears and other responses to traumatic stress. Common responses include:

- Anxiety or nervousness
- Irritability
- Depression
- Anger

- Mood swings
- Physical symptoms such as chronic aches and pains or difficulty sleeping
- Nightmares

It is also all too common—but harmful—to manage one’s anger and desire to feel a greater sense of control by blaming some group (such as Chinese people, Asian Americans more generally, the government) for the situation.

—Adapted from “Coping with Fears Following a Traumatic Event,”  
U.S. Coastguard/Homeland Security

We need to turn to God and to one another in hope. Hope assures us that, with God’s grace, we will see our way through what now seems such a daunting challenge. For believers, hope is not a matter of optimism, but a source for strength and action in demanding times. For peacemakers, hope is the indispensable virtue. This hope, together with our response to call of conversion, must be rooted in God’s promise and nourished by prayer, penance, and acts of charity and solidarity. Our nation and the Church are being tested in fundamental ways...

Our community of faith has the responsibility to live out in our time the challenges of Jesus in the Beatitudes—to comfort those who mourn, to seek justice, to become peacemakers. We face these tasks with faith and hope, asking God to protect and guide us as we seek to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ in these days of trial.

—U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,  
“A Pastoral Message: Living with Faith and Hope After September 11,”  
November 14, 2001

## OBSERVE

1. Interview a family member or friend, asking how the events surrounding COVID-19 have affected them. What were their main concerns during the spring of 2020? In what ways, if any, did fear, worry, irritability, or stress affect them? In what ways does worry or stress continue to affect them?

2. Interview a friend about ways in which members of their household did or did not agree about appropriate measures that should be taken to prevent catching or spreading COVID-19. Also ask about disagreements regarding family finances or the national economy. What were the areas of disagreement? How did the household deal with the disagreement? What role did fear play in this disagreement?

2. What was your initial reaction to the news about COVID-19 in February or March 2020? What fears or anxieties do you or family members still experience as a result of this—regarding health, finances, or other matters?

3. What anxieties have developed in your children as a result of their experience with COVID-19?

4. List what aids or techniques you or your family members have used to cope or help your children cope with the fears that you experience as a result of the uncertainties in your world.

## **JUDGE**

1. How does your faith play a part in how you deal with the uncertainties of this world?
2. Do you believe what some people call “faith” regarding their response to the coronavirus is really overconfidence? Explain your thoughts on this. How do you think Christian households can deal with disagreements on this question?
3. Which of the things listed in Observe 4 have been the most successful for you?
4. In light of the Bishops’ Pastoral Message, what are you as a Christian called to do when traumatic events occur in our world?
5. How can you promote a freedom from unwarranted fear in your home?

## **ACT**

1. Have a family meeting and discuss with your family what they would do in the event of a fire or accident if one of the parents were unable to be there. Or discuss your family’s current plan for dealing with COVID-19.
2. Join or initiate a neighborhood group that will look out for each other in the event of an emergency, such as a wildfire, hurricane, earthquake, flood, or disease outbreak.
3. Volunteer for a local relief agency, such as the Red Cross, or a public health service in your community.
4. Adopt the custom of blessing your family members when they leave home for work, school, or travel.
6. Identify counseling resources in your community that can help you or family members deal with a traumatic experience. Share your findings with your group.

## **RESOURCES**

Hutchinson, Gloria, *Be Comforted: Healing in Times of Loss, Anger, Anxiety, Loneliness, Sickness, Death*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004.

Overberg, Kenneth R., *Into the Abyss of Suffering: A Catholic View*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2003.



See more Meeting Plans and Directions for Holding a CFM meeting, visit [http://www.cfm.org/supplemental materials](http://www.cfm.org/supplemental_materials)

For more CFM Meeting Plans, become a member of the Christian Family Movement. <https://www.cfm.org/join-and-renew-form>