

When trouble comes to us, or suffering, or some unexpected adversity, illness or weakness, nothing has 'gone wrong' – it's just the nature of life: a mix of good and bad.

When we lose those we love, or when we have to stand by and watch those we love suffer physically or psychologically, no one is 'punishing' us – it's just the way things are: a mix of good and bad.

When we're plunged into worry or anxiety, when we have accidents and mishaps, when relationships go wrong and people hurt or betray us, our life hasn't taken a wrong turning – that's simply what life is like: a mix of good and bad.

There's nothing personal about any of it. Although our sufferings are acutely personal to us, they're not aimed at us personally. It's the way things are.

Covid 19 doesn't have a grudge against us; it isn't intelligent; it does not have a malicious purpose – it's just the way it is.

Life is a mixture of good and bad and there's no guarantee or promise that that we'll have more of the good than the bad. When the bad comes our way, nothing has gone wrong, we're not being punished, life hasn't taken a wrong turning, God isn't angry – it's just the way things are. There's nothing personal about it.

This is the realisation that Jesus calls us to when he says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus' easy yoke and light burden is actually a way of *looking at and understanding the world* – and it isn't the way we're used to looking at and understanding it. My prayer every day is: 'Lord, may my heart be opened to your grace that I may see and understand in a different way.'

Sometimes life is wonderful, full of joy, beauty and delight; sometimes life is so unspeakably awful that all

we can do is hold our heads high and get through it with as much dignity as possible.

All this is because the nature of life is passing, ephemeral and illusionary; that's hard to grasp when we're got a toothache or a good friend has just died, but it is so. Nevertheless, pain passes and even grief is not bottomless. St Teresa of Avila famously said:

'Let nothing trouble you,
let nothing make you afraid;
all things are passing –
only God never changes.
Patient endurance attains all;
Whoever God possesses lacks nothing.
God alone is sufficient.'

It may seem a really peculiar thing to say when we consider our life past, present and to come: the upbringing we have had, our parents and our families, the children we have brought into the world, the careers we have carved or the jobs we have taken, the spouses we have loved, the friends we have made – it

may seem a really peculiar thing to say, but we shouldn't take it all so personally. A person's life has a far greater significance than the simply personal.

Compared to the reality of our being – which is a participation in the plenitude of divine Being – our life in this world is only a virtual reality, whether it be golden and bright or dark and brutish. The 13th century Sufi mystic, Jalal ad-Din Rumi said: “It came to be shown to me that we are God's shadow, and the world is our shadow”. In other words, we live in a two-dimensional reality. Look at the shadow you cast in a sunny street: how real is he shadow to you? It exists, certainly, but how close is it to the three-dimensional you? That is how the world is to us, whether we know it or not.

In the Koran, which sometimes quotes Jesus, it is written:

“The Master Jesus, blessings and peace be upon him, said: “This world is like a bridge: cross over it, but do not build your house on it.””

This is perfect advice for living our life in the light of our being. Life is the unfolding, in time and change, of the timelessness and changelessness of Being. This is the vision of Jesus whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. It is what the 18th century spiritual writer Jean Pierre de Caussade called 'living in the sacrament of the present moment.'

We need some thread to pull us through life's demanding complications towards our true home in the present moment. In one of Chesterton's 'Father Brown' stories – which Evelyn Waugh used in *Brideshead Revisited* – Fr Brown is talking about how he caught a thief; he says: "I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."

The Lord twitches upon the thread when we are overwhelmed by the million-and-one strident voices calling for our attention, a cacophony all around us from the press, the radio, the television, the computer, all

urging us to be beautiful, stand up for humanism, defend religion against atheism, buy the best, read this book, listen to that music, obey this law, take this drug, have this holiday, indulge yourself, borrow money, win the lottery, vote for this party and not the other, eat the right food and keep telling yourself that life is wonderful – and all this is a hard yoke and a heavy burden - but, but, but – above all, don't think of any reality that transcends this. Don't even think of the possibility of a transcendent beauty, truth and goodness from which every pinpoint of beauty, truth and goodness in the world comes – don't dare to imagine a reality that is easy and light. A reality that can only be known in the sacrament of the present moment – a reality that the Lord calls us to when he says: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” This yoke is a vision, a way of seeing, an understanding of the heart, a realisation that our life in this world is not all it seems to be. And the Lord offers it to us.