



Languishing and Hope in the Christian Life

Early Spring brings together a trinity of blessings – Easter, Catholic Education Week and Mental Health Week. Each offers a unique prism for viewing challenges. Recently I read a news item the defined one reaction to our present challenge as “languishing”.¹ We are languishing in this pandemic, feeling stuck, drained. Like plants deprived of rich soil, we are spindly and spent, lacking vitality and drive. Teachers notice this. Their students are unmotivated. Even the natural leaders can’t rouse themselves. I notice it. I’ve spent so much time sitting that I’ve worn a comfy, little indent in my couch. I sit watching Netflix, even as my mind instructs me that I would really feel so much better if I went for a walk. My mind is right, yet I sit, not having the oomph to act on my own good advice.

The Mental Health Prism says, “Name your feelings.” Naming feelings gives us a critical distance, a space to observe the self. It allows us to see that we are separate from our feelings. We can then make choices. Is there something I can do differently? Can I handle

this on my own or do I need help?

I felt relieved when I heard the word, languishing. It fit my experience and made sense of my puzzling behaviours. I could accept this. It’s okay that I’m feeling this way. I understand it and I can deal with it.

“Nurturing Hope”, our Catholic Education Week theme, offers a somewhat different angle. It holds out hope as not simply a feeling, but a virtue. Virtues aren’t acquired by accident but through deliberate choices made repeatedly until they become habitual. We nurture virtues. We nurture hope.

Nurturing hope might mean refusing to be consumed with our disappointments and frustrations. It is important to acknowledge the injustices and failings we encounter. Hope reminds us to also have eyes for the graced story happening alongside the ugliness.

Easter is our third prism. The motif of Jesus’ ministry, passion and death as the necessary preparation for his rising and exaltation informs the Christian imagination. Suffering and joy, failure and victory, light and shadow are the seasons of life. We can carry our crosses through whatever challenges life brings. And we do this with confidence that God, in his love, accompanies us. No matter how deep the hurt it will never be the last word. The last word will always be new life and resurrection.

We celebrate hope.
When our hearts are heavy and discouraged,
When we are too weary to go on,
We believe in hope.
When we are discouraged and trampled and sad and broken
We believe we will rise again.
Strength and vitality will return to ignite the spark in our hearts,
And we will renew our efforts to advocate for love,
Advocate for justice, advocate for your kingdom, O God and creator of all.
Lord, you know our human condition. You know growth is slow -
Two steps forward, one step back.
That step back can feel like the end – like failure!
Until Easter sings its strong and persistent song -
The song of resurrection, of new life that grows silently underground,
Of timid and tender shoots that emerge, slowly strengthen and burst into beauty.
Lord, we trust in hope, even when we cannot feel it.
We believe in your presence with us as we seek to do your will.

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1. Adam Grant, The New York Times, Published April 19, 2021.