



Prayer resource for CEIST schools

Introduction

This resource emerged out of a very timely request from one of our CEIST schools. They are for use as part of a broader package of support for students, their families and the wider school community in a time of mourning. Your school will have its own critical incident plan and these prayers are written to help you execute the spiritual care dimension of that plan in these very challenging times of physical isolation.

As a school, the thing we want to do most when a member of our school community dies or experiences a significant loss in terms of the death of a family member is to gather together; that's an incredibly strong human instinct. We want to hold one another, to grieve and to offer support. And as a Catholic school, we want to be together to pray, to ask for God's help, to feel the closeness God who cares for us especially when we are feeling low, lost or alone.

Unfortunately, at the moment, because of the Covid-19 restrictions, grieving is made more difficult because we must stay physically apart.

We remember other times in our history when this kind of enforced and painful separation happened. We remember, years ago, when a son or a daughter went to America and heard of a father or a mother's death; an ocean separated them, there was nothing to be done. We can really feel now the awful sadness of that kind of experience. When we experience grief now during this pandemic, we must be gentle with ourselves firstly, and then we must try to be gentle with one another. We ask also for the grace to receive help from our own family members. And if we feel unbearably alone and sad, we pray for the courage to reach out for help to get us through this time of aloneness and grief.

Fortunately, because of technology we don't have to be entirely alone. All we need to feel even a little bit more connected is a smart phone, a desktop computer, a tablet or a laptop. In these spaces we can generate a kind of togetherness that might just be sufficient to console and sustain us until we are able to reach out physically to the ones who are suffering. We can show our compassion by standing with them even when we are apart.

Finally, as strange as it might seem, even in this suffering we are being called to growth; spiritually and emotionally, individually and as a school community. These resources will hopefully unite your community and will inspire courage. God is with you and your students. And all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.



Some practical considerations

In terms of sharing any information (including the name of the person, the time and date of death and the cause of death) regarding the death of a student, teacher, parent, other staff member etc., the usual due care must be taken to ensure permission is sought from the family of the person who has died. A link can be provided, with the family's permission, to the death notice on www.rip.ie. Again, with permission, a photograph of the deceased could be used at the start of the prayer service if you feel that that would be appropriate.

We should obviously communicate information about the death of a student, a relative of a student or a teacher very carefully. While some students may have heard the sad news from friends and classmates, others will not. Your critical incident planning should help you to decide how to best communicate this information in your own context, knowing your own cohort of students as well as you do. The care of younger students is particularly important to consider in this regard. For many students, not just first years or second years, this could well be one of their first experiences of grief following the death of someone they know. And doing this grieving without their friends and teachers will be challenging. Their own family's support will obviously be key. Sharing this very sad information through parents/guardians is probably the most appropriate course of action. Any anxiety generated by the news will need to be listened to and responded to appropriately in their own home contexts.

These prayers are designed for use by individuals in their own home. Students can of course pray these prayers on their own but it might be better if you were to suggest that the prayers are said with a parent/guardian and their wider family. We shouldn't underestimate the support parents will also need in terms of helping their son/daughter come to terms with their loss. A resource such as this might help the parents/guardians have the conversations that need to happen with their son/daughter – keep talking is the message we want to send.

At the same time, we acknowledge that some students will feel happier to pray these prayers on their own – that's fine too. However, what is important is that parents are aware of the resource and are aware that their son/daughter will be engaging with it.

As part of your school's critical incident plan, and depending on the circumstances, some thought might also be given to providing students and others with relevant contact numbers so they can actually talk to someone about what is going on for them. Because of these very challenging times for students – times of incredible uncertainty – we must remember that an experience of deep grief might cause some students to feel very fragile indeed. Part of your critical incident planning will obviously name that.

Schools will be aware that Dioceses and individual parishes are following HSE guidelines around mass gatherings and so parishes are holding funeral masses for close family members only. A memorial mass may be held for the deceased once CoVid 19 restrictions have been lifted. This is also important to communicate to your school; students **will** get a chance to mourn together and to support one another in time. While any kind of real planning for this kind of gathering is impossible



at the moment, obviously naming it as something you *will* do is important for students and their families to know.

Finally, if technology allows there is of course the possibility that a class group could be gathered together through an online forum to pray these prayers together. Again, your critical incident planning will decide if this is the best way to proceed or not and the prayers can be adapted as necessary to do this.

How to use these resources

There are two sets of resources here. Part A contains a prayer service that can be adapted for specific moments (e.g. death of a student, death of a teacher, death of a parent and so on) and Part B contains other prayer resources that your school community could access, for example, via your website for their own personal use.

PART A

This prayer service can be adapted for use following the death of a student, a colleague/teacher, a parent of a student or teacher, the death of a sibling of a student or the death of someone from the wider school community.

A communication could be sent to all students to pray together, if possible, at the same time using the prayer service. This would generate that feeling of solidarity so very important at a time of mourning.

The prayer service has '7 moments' in it. Each moment is a prayer or a reflection. This would be good information to share with students when you're sharing the prayer so that they have a sense of the length of the service and how they are to manage it. Some instructions to either the students or their parents will be needed to help them do this; many students will not necessarily be used to praying like this. Your RE teacher can help you frame this guidance.

In terms of some of the thinking behind the composition of this prayer service, the following might be helpful to note:

1. The words of comfort the student speaks to himself/herself or within his/her family are the words you as the Principal of a Catholic school would be speaking in a prayer service or an assembly. These are words of consolation; words that come from deep within our Christian faith; a faith that speaks about the Resurrection, that proclaims love and hope, that speaks about God's care, and a faith that speaks about the importance of being with those who mourn. These are Christian prayers, rather than more secular reflections. Although secular reflections also of course have their place and can be very moving, Christian prayers always put the relationship between God and us, his children, at the centre.



2. The focus of these prayers is also very firmly on the family of the deceased. This is important because it puts the student's own grief, which may well be very significant, into context. It also helps students know that in praying as they do, they are helping the deceased person's family. This is the sixth spiritual work of mercy; to comfort the afflicted. In other words, these prayer services are not simply about acknowledging 'my own' pain, they also recognise how others are experiencing even greater pain and how God comforts us all in this as we stand together.
3. These prayers can be personalised and can speak to the specific reality of the loss the school is experiencing. Death has become real for students and we shouldn't pretend otherwise by treating the experience in the abstract. The prayers can also name the context of the wider school community's faith life. Therefore, with the help of your RE team, these resources can and should be adapted. With the family's express permission, the name of the person who has died could be inserted. Perhaps a poem/prayer with which the students are familiar because of work they're doing could be used. A prayer or a hymn associated with the school's founding congregation could also be included. Your school crest could also of course be included. However, we would advise against using anything that might make the tone of the service too maudlin, or introspective. Because you are not physically there to lead students through their grief, it is important that emotions are suitably contained; if that's possible. This isn't about creating a false stoicism, but rather about immersing students in a Christian hope that is respectful and appropriate to the very strange context in which they are currently experiencing this grief.
4. Every effort in the prayer service has been made to use plain English. Because this is an 'online'/remote' prayer, it is even more important that it is kept very simple and indeed, quite short. It's important that the prayers are accessible to students and their families. These prayer services should be suitable for a range of students but you and your RE team will be best placed in terms of adapting what's here for your own students. Language used should never be a barrier to us accessing God's loving kindness in our lives.



**PART A****Prayer Service following the loss of a member of the school community or the loss of a family member of someone in our school community****Introduction**

With your parents'/guardians' knowledge and/or permission, light a small candle as you begin this prayer. This candle represents God's light and love. There are dozens of candles being lit now by students in your school and also by your teachers. The light symbolises the way we are together united as a school community to support (....) family.

Prayer moment 1:

We're all going to start our prayer today, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." These are the words that we use when we pray in our school because we believe God is about relationship; Father with Son with Holy Spirit.

Our school is about relationships too; most of all it is about our friendships. God is love and is our friend. We are called to care for one another as God care for us.



We take a moment to remember (.....) who has died. We each spend some time thinking about (....) as we knew him/her. Maybe we knew him/her well, maybe not so well. Whatever level our relationship was with (...) we recall them in our mind's eye and we pause to honour their memory.

Prayer moment 2:

Because of the restrictions on us, we can't do what we would normally do. We'd normally be together to look after one another; to offer one another support and to support (.....) family. So not being together feels very strange and sad.

We're conscious of the sadness we all feel but know that as sad as we are feeling, it probably doesn't even compare to how sad (.....) family and closest friends are feeling. But please God, (....) family will feel lifted up even a little bit by our prayer today and by knowing that our whole school is praying with them and for them today. That is an amazing thought; we are all together now in this moment of being together; this is real solidarity. And God is very much with us as well.

We pause now for a moment to remember (.....) family and close friends. God may your love and our solidarity and support help them to get through this very difficult time.

Prayer moment 3:

This is what the bible says about sadness like the sadness in our school at the moment:

- The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. (Deut 38)
- So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41)
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5)

Spend some time with these three quotations. What one is helpful to you now? Spend some time with it, just thinking about how it might also comfort (....) family. If you're with your family, spend some time talking with them about these bible texts.



**Prayer moment 4:**

At the end of each prayer we say.....**O Lord, hear my prayer.**

- God you love us, you are our hope. Help us to get through these sad days, help us all to reach out to others for help and support. Response: O Lord hear our Prayer
- God you love my friends, help them to know that even though we can't all be together as a school community, we are together in spirit. Response: O Lord hear our Prayer
- God you love (.....). May he/she rest in your peace. Response: O Lord hear our Prayer
- God you love (.....) family in a special way at this time. Be with them as they mourn. Their pain is so bad. But you know what they need. Help them in these days of grief. Give them the hope that comes from the Resurrection. Help them to know we care for them too and we are showing our care through these prayers and in whatever other ways we can at this difficult time. Help them to know we will always be there for them. Response: O Lord hear our Prayer
- God you love all of our efforts. (.....) death puts everything into context. The most important things in life are our health, our families, our friends and for many people, our faith. Help us to value what is important. Help us also to continue to live good lives doing the best we can in our work and in our care for one another in these difficult days of isolation and sadness. Response: O Lord hear our Prayer
- God you love our school community. You are our hope. (Insert name of founder/foundress her) prayer for us, be with our community. Response: O Lord hear our Prayer

Prayer moment 5:

We say this special prayer now for (...) This prayer is quite similar to the prayer used at a funeral. These words are said when a person has died to show us that God is there for (...).

May the choirs of angels come to greet you. May they speed you to paradise. May the Lord enfold you in his mercy. May you find eternal life. Amen.

**Prayer moment 6:**

Our prayer time with our school is coming to an end. We now read or say aloud this beautiful poem by John O'Donoghue. I pray it for (...) and his/her family.

On the Death of the Beloved by John O'Donohue (adapted)

Though we need to weep your loss,
You dwell in that safe place in our hearts,
Where no storm or night or pain can reach
you.

Your love was like the dawn
Brightening over our lives
Awakening beneath the dark
A further adventure of colour.

The sound of your voice
Found for us
A new music
That brightened everything.

Though your days here were brief,
Your spirit was live, awake, complete.
Amen.

Though we cannot see you with outward
eyes,
We know our soul's gaze is upon your face,
Smiling back at us from within everything.

Let us not look for you only in memory.
May you continue to inspire us:

To enter each day with a generous heart.
To serve the call of courage and love
Until we see your beautiful face again
In that land where there is no more
separation,
Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
And where we will never lose you again.

Prayer moment 7:

We turn again to the candle we lit at the start of this prayer. We think of all the other candles lighting. We think of all of our friends and thank God for them. Our prayer is coming to an end now.

Dear Jesus, (...), a member of our school community and friend to many of us, has died, and we come to You today to give thanks for the gift of his/her life, and for all of the ways in which he/she touched our lives. Comfort his/her family and be very close to them in their sadness and loss.

Help us to help and support each other, especially those within our school who feel most deeply the loss of (...). Help us to always care for each other in our school, and say thank you to You every day for all of the people who love us and help us.

We place (...) into Your loving hands Jesus and ask You to receive him/her into Your heavenly Kingdom where he will be happy forever and ever. Amen.



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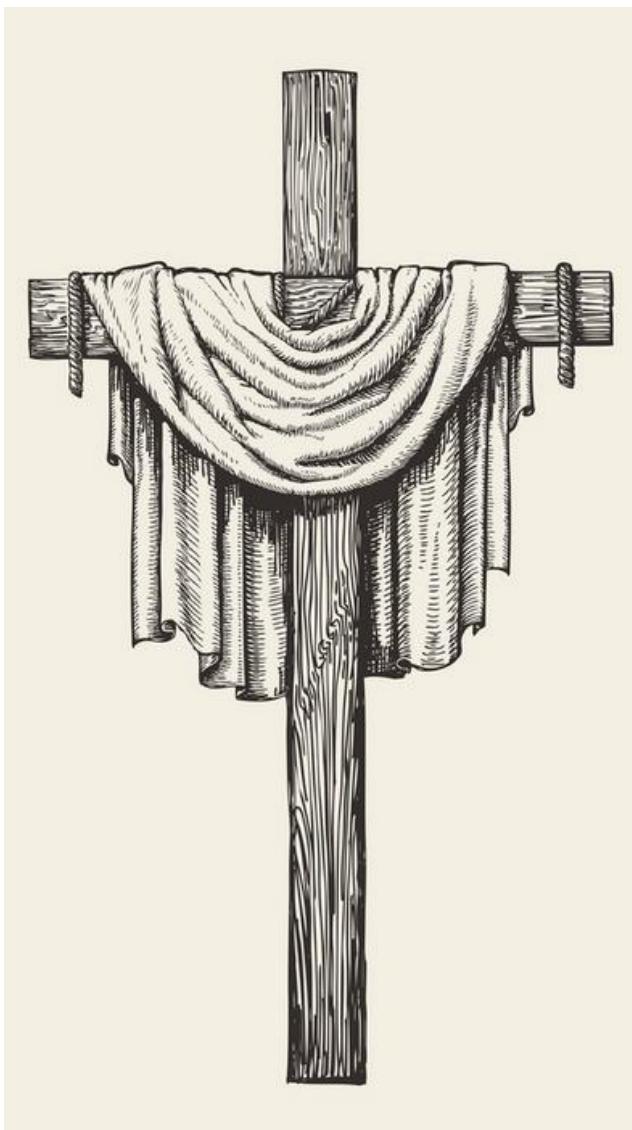


Prayer Resource for CEIST Schools March 2020

Let's now say together the prayer that Jesus taught us to say, the prayer that tells us we have a loving Father in heaven who wants to share our life everyday until we also meet him in heaven.

Our Father.....

(Don't forget to blow out the candle, when you are finished).



**PART B**

This section contains more generic prayers and reflections for times of loss. These can be shared very simply on your website or emailed to particular groups as the need arises. Alternatively, you can use some of them as part of a prayer service.

1. Shock and Sadness at a Sudden Death of a Friend (Adapted, author unknown)

Lord God of Hope we come to you today in really deep grief and with such sadness of heart at the sudden death of such a beloved friend.

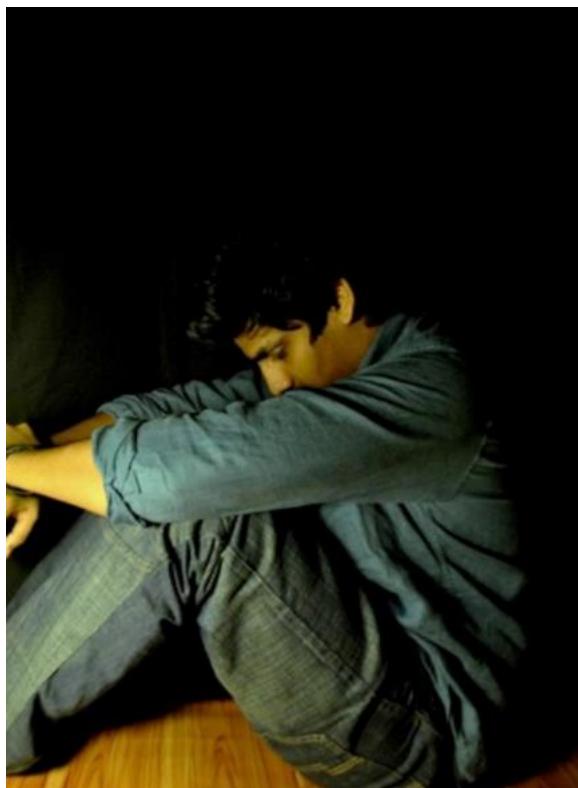
Lord we know that our times are in Your hands but the shock and sadness that the life of this precious person, whom we all love so dearly fills our hearts with deep pain and sorrow.

Be our comfort in this time of loss and comfort all that are in pain today knowing that you are our God of comfort and the Great Comforter who comforts all that are hurting. Be especially close to the family and those that were nearest and dearest. Give them your peace and assurance that you are with them throughout all their pain - and pour the light of your love into their hurting hearts. We make this prayer through Christ our loving Lord Jesus,

Amen



2. Your love carries me (Author unknown)



You know my heart is heavy
And the hurt is deep
But when I feel like giving up
You're reminding me
That we all fall down sometimes
But when I hit the ground

You lift me up when I am weak
Your arms wrap around me
Your love catches me so I'm letting go
You lift me up when I can't see
Your heart is all that I need
Your love carries me so I'm letting go

3. Easter reflections for a time of loss

- Good Friday seemed to confirm the idea that God was dead, asleep or indifferent. Easter Day showed that God was alive, well and caring...In the aftermath of Gethsemane, we catch the fragrance of Eden.

Alister E. McGrath

- 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory'

St John Chrysostom 4th Century Sermon

- '*And the third day he rose again*'; what are we to make of that? One thing is certain: if he was God and nothing else, his immortality means nothing to us; if he was man and no more, his



death is no more important than yours or mine. But if he really was both God and man, then when the man Jesus died, God died too, and when the God Jesus rose from the dead, man rose too, because they were one and the same person. The Church binds us to no theory about the exact composition of Christ's Resurrection Body. Those who saw the risen Christ remained persuaded that life was worth living and death a triviality – an attitude curiously unlike that of the modern defeatist, who is firmly persuaded that life is a disaster and death (rather inconsistently) a major catastrophe.'

Dorothy Sayers

- The Resurrection narratives are not a picture of survival after death; they record how a totally new mode of being has arisen in the Universe. Something new had appeared in the Universe; as new as the first coming of organic life. This Man, after death, does not get divided into 'ghost' and 'corpse'. A new mode of being has arisen. That is the story. What are we going to make of it?

C.S. Lewis: The Strangest Story of All

4. PSALM 23: The Lord is my Shepherd

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage. You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.





5. Pope Francis's advice to us about how to grieve (adapted)

<https://www.dioceseofbmt.org/2016/09/27/pope-francis-instructs-on-how-to-respond-to-grief-or-anguish/>)

Don't respond to grief or anguish by avoiding it or trying to numb it with alcohol or drugs, Pope Francis advises us.

Figure out what is going on inside your heart, then turn to God and beg him for help, he said during an early morning Mass in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae a few years ago.

Reflecting on the day's readings, the first of which was about poor Job who lost everything, the pope looked at the "spiritual desolation" experience by Job and the responsorial psalm, "Let my prayer come before you, Lord."

Job lost everything and felt utterly abandoned and unfairly tormented, the pope said. He unleashed his desperate cries to God, venting all of his feelings of hopeless despair and regret, and yet, he never cursed God in his ranting, he said.

Everyone has experienced some degree of despair that "makes us feel as if our soul were crushed," unable to breathe and perhaps even eager for death, the pope said.

"We have to understand when our spirit is in this state of extended sadness, where there is almost no air. This happens to all of us" to some degree, he said.

So then what should people do when they go through "these dark moments because of a family tragedy, an illness, something that brings me down?" he asked.

In times of hopeless, spiritual despair, he said, the answer is to pray hard, just like Job, who cried out day and night for God to listen.

He said Psalm 88 and its response — "Let my prayer come before you, Lord" — "is a prayer of knocking at (God's) door, but hard. 'Lord my soul is surfeited with troubles and my life draws near to the nether world. I am numbered with those who go down into the pit; I am a man without strength.'"

This is praying with genuine candour and honesty, he said, because it is the way a child pours out his emotions to his father. And this is how "we must pray in the most terrible, darkest, most desolate, crushing moments."

When someone we care about is hurting and trapped in this spiritual despair, he said, the best thing to do is "talk as little as possible" because in these cases speeches "ultimately do not help and they can cause harm, too."

A person can help with loving silence, "being close, a caress and prayers to the father."



The pope asked that people pray for the grace to recognize and reflect upon the reasons for their despair, the grace to pray fervently to the Lord in times of trouble, and the grace to know how to best accompany those who are suffering, sad and despairing



6. Prayer for the Dead

Into your hands, O Lord,
we humbly entrust our friend,
In this life you embraced them with your tender love;
deliver them now from every evil
and bid them eternal rest.

The old order has passed away:
welcome them into paradise,
where there will be no sorrow, no weeping or pain,
but fullness of peace and joy
with your Son and the Holy Spirit
forever and ever.
Amen.



**7. A School grieves together for a student (adapted, www.bgcdsb.org)**

Dear Jesus, _____, a member of our school community and friend to many of us, has died, and we come to You today to give thanks for the gift of his/her life, and for all of the ways in which he touched our lives

Comfort his/her family and be very close to them in their sadness and loss.

Help us to help and support each other, especially those within our school who feel most deeply the loss of _____. Be with his/her classmates, and with the classmates of his/her family members in a very special way. Help us to always care for each other in our school, and say thank you to You every day for of the people who love us and help us.

We place _____ into Your loving hands Jesus, and ask You to receive him/her into Your heavenly Kingdom where he will be happy forever and ever. Amen.

Let's now say together the prayer that Jesus taught us to say, the prayer that tells us we have a loving Father in heaven who wants to share our life everyday until we also meet him in heaven. Our Father.....

8. Support us all the day long (St John Henry Newman)

O LORD, SUPPORT US ALL THE DAY LONG, UNTIL THE SHADOWS LENGTHEN AND THE EVENING COMES, AND THE BUSY WORLD IS HUSHED, AND THE FEVER OF LIFE IS OVER, AND OUR WORK IS DONE. THEN IN THY MERCY GRANT US A SAFE LODGING, AND A HOLY REST, AND PEACE AT THE LAST.

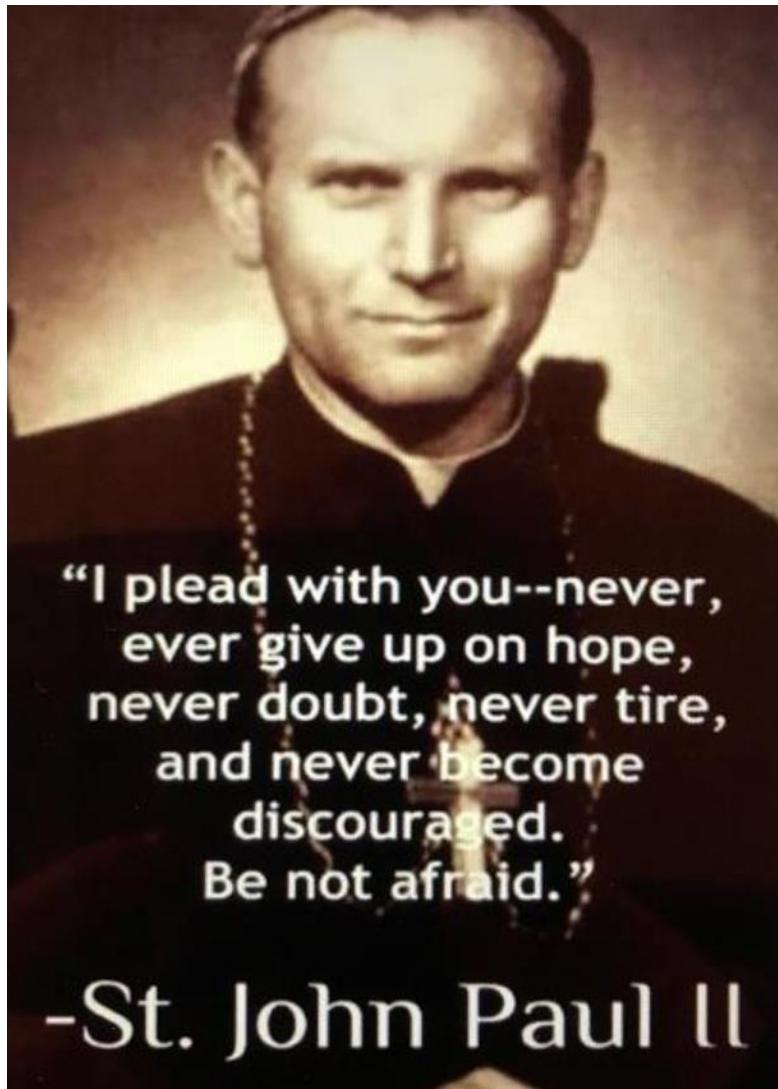
- JOHN HENRY NEWMAN -

**9. A reading from the book of Wisdom3:1- 6 (abbreviated)**

They are at peace with God. The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, no torment shall ever touch them.

In the eyes of the unwise, they did appear to die, their going looked like a disaster, their leaving us, like annihilation; but they are in peace

They who trust in him will understand the truth; those who are faithful will live with him in love; for grace and mercy await those he has chosen.

10. Words from St John Paul II

**“I plead with you--never,
ever give up on hope,
never doubt, never tire,
and never become
discouraged.
Be not afraid.”**

-St. John Paul II



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