

# Along the track

## The Challenge

Don't we love a challenge? We watch them on all sorts of programs on TV and other media platforms. The weekly footy is usually laced with the language of challenge, the survival of the fittest. Reality TV even makes a cooking show a challenge and pretending to survive in a jungle. Video games are designed to challenge the player at many levels. We humans like to think of ourselves as dominant in just about every aspect of life.

But now we have a challenge in real life, a battle that we have never fought before. Right here on every doorstep, in every house or flat or apartment, wherever we live. It isn't over in ninety minutes, or one day or even four days. It is going to go on for months and every one of us is involved, whether we like it or not, even though we did not choose to compete in this. But without all of us co-operating, we will not be up to the challenge.

The challenge is in two parts, firstly, to beat this invisible virus by taking seriously what we are being told to do, to stay at home as much as possible, to keep our distance, to find other ways to greet people. Keep the rules about visitors and visiting. Find other ways to keep in touch - through social media, the internet. The enforced isolation will go on for weeks - probably months. We just don't know for how long and that's hard.

We are by nature social animals. We tend to gather in groups, into communities. At a time like this, however, we can do the things to avoid catching the virus but when fear and uncertainty are so prevalent, we can seek scapegoats, we can believe every rumour, every new story. We want solutions; we want to know who to blame. We may have chosen to believe the racist stories circulating on social media, the rumours, the fake stories, the conspiracy theories that abound. When our contact with the outside world is mediated by the social platforms, that can be easy enough to do. Just don't share them, don't send them on.

In times of fear and uncertainty, panic buying, hoarding, black marketeering, brawling in supermarkets is not seen as selfish and uncaring, but as a legitimate protection of my needs. It isn't. This is not a time for meanness, for suspicion or for hatred. It is time to resist those corrosive attacks on our community, our way of life. It may be a time of isolation but we still belong to a unique and wonderful community and we need to work to keep that alive.

So the first part of the challenge is how to keep ourselves safe and well - health wise and mind-wise. No more panic buying and hoarding essentials, in fact it is a time to check and see whether others have the essentials they need. Given all these restrictions, we are challenged to find ways to care for those we love, those who are dear to us even though they may not be near? How will we keep in touch?

And what about those who will do it tough - the ones who are alone, those who are going to lose their jobs, those who do become ill, even if not with the dreaded virus. And what about those out there in the front line, the first responders?

The second part of the challenge is much harder. We could make this a time of preparing for the Resurrection. What does that mean? When we finally emerge from our homes, when we finally get the all clear, it could be to a very different Australia. If we are to be effectively locked away in our homes, instructed to have as little to do with each other as possible, we must cultivate those things that make us who we are as a community, a nation. Even at this time.

When the cyclones came in NQ, the first thing you noticed was the silence. The birds had gone. You knew the cyclone had passed when you could hear the birds again. But the birds are still singing - go outside and listen. People are still calling out; "How are you?" In Europe, people are singing to each other across the empty squares, keeping their windows open so that those who are alone may hear the sounds of family around them. What do you do each day to keep in touch? How are you reaching out to your community? Who do you call each day? We can still help shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary without going out. Selfless women and men are doing that for us every day, even in these trying times. They need our support, not just our money, our donations. And a prayer each day for them will never go astray. We are rightly proud of our reputation as a generous people but isolation and suspicion can erode that very easily.

This time of preparing for the Resurrection is a time for reflection, for prayer, for taking time to appreciate what we have, even the little things. Never take them for granted, the wonders of nature on our doorstep, the freedom to walk down the street, to knock on doors, to visit, to shake hands, to embrace those we love, to welcome each day for its freshness, its richness. When all this is over, when the darkest days are behind us and we open our doors again, it could be a time when we nurture a fairer, more just, kinder and more open Australia. This is a time for reflecting on what such an Australia might look like, and more importantly, how we can make that happen? Life is going to be a lot harder for many, many people. Employment will take quite some time to pick up. Savings will have been depleted. But we can plan now so that the future won't be defined by the mistakes of our past. These last months have brought out the best in us.... and the worst.

Regards  
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