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Peace in The Middle of The Storm

Ronald Washignton Dr
University of the Incarnate Word

Sandra L. Guzman-Foster Ph.D.
University of the Incarnate Word

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INTRODUCTION

The past two and half years have undeniably been this generation's most challenging. Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), there have been 570 million COVID cases and 6.38 million deaths worldwide. In the United States, there have been 89,972,868 cases and a total of 1,021,546 deaths and counting. During this same period, the relentless assault and murder of Black men and women by police officers in the United States escalated, culminating in the death of George Floyd, and resulting in protests by thousands in the streets around the world. Add to that eighty-four percent of American postsecondary students having some or all instruction moved to online-only as based on the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) and you have a biblical revelation experience for educators.

This article is a commentary on how two tenured professors at a faith-based institution, teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels, attempt to address the question “Is God still on campus and where is He in all this?” while spreading the good news and utilizing their talents to glorify God during a traumatic period in the world.

BIBLICAL REVELATION

(NIV Bible, 2011, Revelation 1:1) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants’ things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

The Revelation of God provides His servant John an opportunity to peer into the future where God puts into motion several biblical phenomena that signal His coming. Through this revelation God deals directly with the seven churches in Asia Minor and uses symbolic imagery to describe the events that must occur. The book of Revelation ends with the final triumph of God over all evil. As Christians we often look to the future with an eye on the biblical Revelation of Christ as a destination, ignoring the challenges we must all face to get there. When the Pandemic really began to spread, it became very evident that this was a phenomenon on a biblical scale that would play out with significant impact on the nation’s academic institutions.

University campuses are diverse communities that span the spectrum of beliefs. This becomes especially evident when at a faith-based institution. For some, the pandemic brought a sense of despair, for others relief from a structured schedule, and others a sense of isolation. As the number of infections and deaths grew rapidly students and faculty were sent back into neutral corners to communicate through a digital medium some of our students, and frankly some faculty, found it difficult to navigate (Maqableh & Alia, (2021). This phenomenon, in the context of university life, at a faith-based institution, would appear to make faculty uniquely prepared to face the challenge; right? Catholic social justice and teaching represent that foundational Christian undergirding these institutions promote, correct?

UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

To understand my faith journey and how I maneuvered through the storm of the past three years, you must place yourself in the position of an African American professor of technology at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) where our first core value is faith. I have come to a place in life where I see the work I do as my ministry and way of serving God. I still consider myself as evolving in the profession although I reached tenure recently. In fact, I would say that all educators continue to grow in the profession and each semester brings a new and different challenge. The difference between 2019 and

2022 has been the many simultaneous challenges educators have faced globally. From infectious diseases, supply chain issues, police murders and social unrest, I have gone to my knees in prayer many times. I often sought some divine insight on how to support students of some faith, no faith and great faith. Answering questions like, where is God in all this, and has He moved off campus, has been addressed repeatedly through my experiences with students. These experiences exemplify the challenges I have faced during my time as an educator.

Between 2019 and 2022, two specific experiences help me recognize that God is an omniscient and omnipresent God that you have the option to engage anywhere or at any time you want. In the book *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis (1942) ponders the thought, “How significant it would be to not be known by Him who knows all things and to be excluded from the presence of Him who is everywhere” (p. 8). Yet, each of us has a choice in the matter. During the pandemic that began in the fall of 2019 through to the spring of 2022, I encountered two students at different stages in their lives seeking advice. Each student’s situation challenged me to ask where is God and what is His plan for me in this situation.

I have been pressed deeper into my faith as I have considered how their circumstances reflect so many young people during this time. The first student’s experience asked me to answer the question: am I my brother or sister's keeper and what is my responsibility to them? I will call this student the God Seeker. The next experience walked me along the Emmaus Road. According to the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus met two disciples who did not immediately recognize Him but engaged Him until His appearance was made clear. I will call this student the God curious. Let me be clear, this isn’t about them as much as it is not about me as a professor placed in unrelenting circumstances that constantly put me in the situation of asking, is God still on campus?

Experience with the God Seeker: I often retreat to the campus chapel on difficult days to find peace and place my burdens down at the feet of God. This is where I can always find God on campus. Rarely do I find students here and I can lay it all out in front of Him alone. On this occasion, sitting the middle pew, was a student who appeared to have more to share with God than me at the time. I hesitated to approach the student since it was apparent, they were crying. The question came to mind, am I my brother or sisters’ keeper and was it my responsibility to share their burden. I could not shy away from those questions so I sat down and simply said, can I pray with you? I did not want to know about what, but I knew the strength to bare whatever burden she had at the time was imperative. We prayed together and asked that we both be blessed with His presence and divine guidance. I later learned that there was a great deal going on in the student’s life. The student was in an abusive relationship and was about to face being without a place to live.

In the New International Version (NIV) Bible, 2011, “the Lord said unto Cain, where is Able thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) It was apparent In God’s response to Cain that he was his brother's keeper. NIV Bible, 2011, Cain was cursed from the earth and made a fugitive and vagabond (Genesis 4: 10-16). I take God very seriously so while this may seem an extreme example, I was not about to take the chance of neglecting what by profession and faith was my responsibility. Through the remainder of the semester, I was informed that the student continued to attend chapel and even collaborate with the mission and ministry members to resolve the issues that troubled them. In this case we found God right where He called us: His sanctuary.

Experience with the God Curious: When engaging students, it is important to establish boundaries. During the spring semester of 2022, with emotions high on and off campus, the need to walk up to the line to assist a student will occur. Through this period, I continually found myself trying to connect students with advocates, professional help, and resources. In walking with students who do not know you I have found it takes many questions to get to the real issue. In NIV Bible, 2011, two disciples of Jesus, returning home after Passover unknowingly encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:

13-32). They were disheartened as they discussed all the things centered round the crucifixion of Jesus. They unknowingly came upon Jesus, and he engaged them in conversation. Throughout the conversation Jesus provided them scripture about all that had to occur, reminding them of God's sovereignty and prophetic teachings. Jesus reminded the disciples that even in this particular storm He was at work and had unlimited resources to sustain them. You never know where someone is in their faith or even if they are a person of faith. What I do know is that God makes His sun to shine and His rain to fall upon both those that believe and those that do not (NIV Bible, 2011, Matt 5:45).

I met a student during the spring semester of 2022 who initially was highly engaged and participated in all aspects of their education. The student demonstrated so much potential that, together with another faculty member, the student landed a paid position on campus. Then suddenly the student began to change. Suddenly there was tardiness, lack of focus, and several absences. When the student did attend, they were very disengaged. The period during the pandemic exposed many things about our society that we blindly ignore each day. I did not consider during my walk with students the challenges they face outside of their life on campus. In this case another case of abuse. The best I could do to walk with this student during this difficult time was to provide them with information and all the resources available to them to address their situation. I constantly reminded them that God's resources were infinite.

As in the parable of the good Samaritan where Jesus addresses the issue of caring for those in need (NIV Bible, 2011, Luke 10:25-37), I felt it my responsibility to do what I could in whatever manner I could to be resourceful. I felt a need to remind the student that God was still in control and His resources were limitless if we only reached out in need. When this student no longer had a computer to use in the classroom, we found one for them. When they needed a safe space to talk to someone, it was provided. The situation placed me in the position of questioning how to be a guide unto her feet while God was the light on the path (NIV Bible, 2011, Psalm 119:105). When the semester ended, I no longer had contact with this student. I remained in contact with those institutional resources that assisted her along her journey, but I never came to know if she took the next step of inviting God into her life. As a professor I do not view my role as a savior in any way. However, as a Christian, I do attempt to practice spreading the good word and acting responsibly towards those I encounter, regardless of their beliefs. I like to think of myself as a guide on a journey with the students through each semester.

We play many roles as professors in all academic institutions whether large or small, private or public. The events of the past three years have added a tremendous amount of pressure to an already challenging profession. Recognizing where God was on campus was made more apparent to me by seeking Him through the experiences I encountered. When I ask myself where God was in the situations I faced at the undergraduate level, where so many students are still seeking direction, I realized that I am the temple of the Holy Spirit (NIV Bible, 2011, 1 Corinthians 6:19); therefore, where I go, there He is. I understand that wherever two or more are gathered in His name He is also present (NIV Bible, 2011, Matt 18:19-20). Proximity has no bearing on His presence. If I allow myself to be used by Him for His glory, He could use me on or off campus.

GRADUATE LEVEL

“Finding God in all things.”

-St. Ignatius Loyola

As a former faculty member at a Jesuit Institution, I am a big fan of St. Ignatius Loyola and Ignatian Spirituality. Finding God in all things is at the core of Ignatian Spirituality and is rooted in our growing awareness that God can be found in everyone, in every place, and in everything. When we learn to pay closer attention to God, we become more thankful and reverent, and through this we become more devoted to God, more deeply in love with Him. This aligns with my university where the incarnational spirituality sees God in us and among us. God is present in our relationships with others. However, during

the global pandemic and social/civil unrest across the world, I would often wonder how I could possibly see God in all things, especially in some people, like our national leaders, and in my colleagues? I would question whether God was around during the most challenging, painful, and difficult times in the past two and a half years.

As a female Mexican American graduate faculty member, the last two and a half years presented challenges, pain, trauma, violence, anxiety, and depression, among other things in an already challenging world. There were many times I was constantly trying to stay afloat in the storms that were taking place in our world: that of a pandemic and that of the social/civil unrest that plagued many cities across the United States and across the world. Most prominent was the trauma and violence many experienced during this time in a place that is supposed to be a space where intellectual growth is encouraged and where dialogue should occur despite one's social, political, and cultural ideologies. Additionally, it is a place where all faiths are welcomed and where all can share their faith. Unfortunately, I would often find that some of my colleagues felt we should go on with *business as usual* and would operate as if nothing was going on in the world. This was so far from what we needed to be doing in our courses. The world was changing in front of us! How can anyone believe that going on, business as usual, would be okay. People were dying from the pandemic and still are today, and there were social/civil issues happening to people, human beings, all God's children and still are today. As a result, I started to question my faith. Was God testing us? Did God abandon us? Where was God during these last two years?

**“Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”
NIV Bible, 2011, Philippians 2:4**

In the spring semester of 2020 and up until the end of the spring semester of 2022, I lost track of how many times students shared the following with me, “In our other classes they act as if nothing is happening in the world. We don't talk about the pandemic, police brutality, the protests, deaths, etc. It is as if they want us to ignore all these issues and go on “business as usual.” It was clear that no other faculty members wanted to make any connections to the real world and that students were to leave the outside world at the Zoom door once they entered the Zoom room. It was as if our students were no longer seen as human beings. They were being treated like square pegs forced to fit perfectly in the shape the university deemed they were destined to fit. As a female faculty member, students would come to me in tears often sharing how they felt dehumanized and ignored. I would stay on Zoom, well past the end of class time (8:45 pm), listening to students who needed to talk about deaths in their families due to COVID, fear from Black mothers for their children who were angry about what they were witnessing on TV and on social media since George Floyd's murder. I witnessed feelings of anxiety and depression. Students came to me and shared that they were drinking more alcohol to release the undue amounts of stress they were experiencing during this time. It was common to hear about stressors such as loss of jobs, teaching young children at home, lack of medical insurance, balancing motherhood, fatherhood, and school, among other issues. These moments were difficult, not because I could not handle the content, but because I could feel their suffering and I wanted to help and protect them from their pain. I have always been one who wants to help and protect others, it is in my nature. In fact, the Bible defines my name as "protector of man" or "defender of man." In this case, it is protector and defender of students/human beings. As a result of my nature and some would argue to a fault, I was mentally and physically exhausted by the end of these evenings. On my drive home from teaching, “Where was God?” would often be the question running through my mind.

“Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

NIV Bible, 2011 John 14:27

After those long nights on Zoom with students, I had trouble sleeping. It was difficult to remove the things I had heard in class. They would continue to race through my mind throughout the night. I would lay wide awake at night, replaying the stories they shared. What am I supposed to do? I am not the kind of person who just ignores when others share, especially during this unprecedented time. After all, I have never lived in a time where we were experiencing a global pandemic. Just like my students, I was also experiencing deaths due to COVID and was traumatized by the murder of George Floyd. I could not unsee what I saw on TV that fateful day on May 25, 2020. Additionally, I was anxious and experienced depression because I could not see my family because of quarantine recommendations. I constantly worried about my parents, especially my dad who has underlying conditions. There were days where I only slept for two hours. Stories of loved ones being taken away in an ambulance and students sobbing would repeatedly play in my mind as I lay in my bed. I kept reliving the tearful questioning and statements we had in class. “What if this will be the last time, I see them?” “Oh my God, what am I going to do?” “People are dying of COVID in the hospitals!” “I can’t focus.” “My children are depressed because they can’t see their friends or their cousins.” These long nights would inevitably impact the following day. The exhaustion would continue but this time more intense. I would get headaches because of the lack of needed sleep. My entire body was out of tune. Additionally, I felt as if I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders. We were expected to show no emotions, no vulnerability, etc. “We are here to teach and only teach,” is what a colleague shared. “What happens outside of the classroom stays outside of the classroom,” was the mantra we were expected to abide too. On these days, and there were many, I would attempt to calm my mind and body, but the distractions of what I was witnessing and hearing, would dominate my thoughts. I would constantly call out, “Where was God?”

“For God does not show favoritism.”

NIV Bible, 2011, Romans 2:11

“I’m so tired of hearing, Black Lives Matter,” Mark, a White student shared in class one evening. I intentionally try to create a classroom culture where all voices are heard with no judgment. It is one of my strengths and where I find I get to know my students better and build mentoring relationships. On this evening we were discussing intersectionality and the deconstruction of our ideologies and paradigms when we work with people who are culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically different from us when it comes to research. When he first blurted this out, I was not sure where it was coming from and wondered why he felt the need to say this statement. Another student beat me to it. “What do you mean?” asked Joe, a Black male student. Mark responded, “Well, that statement is everywhere, I mean on TV, on social media, signs, etc. I’m not saying that Black lives don’t matter, but don’t all lives matter?” My ears perked up, “Aha,” a dominant narrative that had been embedded in all national conversations occurring during this time was now present in my classroom. Did he feel invisible to say such a thing because we were on Zoom? Would he say that if we were in an actual classroom? Joe responded, “It is not about everyone else, this is especially more focused on Black lives because people who look like you don’t experience the same kind of treatment that we do when it comes to the criminal justice system; especially when interacting with the police.” Silence. No more comments came from Mark. I waited for a response from any student. Jessica, a Latina, jumped in, “Well doesn’t this have to do with what we are discussing, deconstructing our ideologies and paradigms? Isn’t this part of what that means, unlearning what we have indirectly learned about people who are different from us?” “I mean I really didn’t understand what Black Lives Matter meant, until Joe said what he said. It now makes sense to me, but I will add that Latinos/as can share similar experiences when it comes to the criminal justice system and interaction with the police. However, I will not change the direction of the conversation and

instead want to hear more about why you feel it should be all lives matter and not Black Lives Matter. Why are you really tired of hearing Black Lives Matter?”

I wanted the students to take care of this topic themselves. However, the White student said, it does not make sense. All lives matter. Aren't we all God's children?" "I mean the people we see on TV weren't exactly saints you know." Once again, the dominant narrative that criminalizes dark bodies entered my zoom room. Bodies shifted as if they were uncomfortable and shocking facial expressions lit up in the little boxes on my computer screen. Angry scowls from a few, especially the Black and Latino men. I took a deep breath and asked, "Why is it so easy to criminalize Black and Brown bodies?" It was a general question to all. "Anyone?" "I mean do we criminalize White bodies?" "What is the dominant narrative related to these questions?" "What are the counternarratives?" "How often do we hear counternarratives?" No one responded. By this time class had gone well beyond 8:45. As much as I did not want to, I had to respect my students' time. I was disappointed that we could not continue addressing this issue and come to an understanding of why "Black Lives Matter." "Please think about these questions and we will come back to it when we meet next week." "If you would like to talk about it sooner, let me know as a week from now is a long time."

On my way home, I could not wrap my mind around how the White student continued to say, "All lives matter," and then continued to use the "they" as a pronoun to put all Blacks into one category. This was a serious topic because the lives of Black people that were at stake. It occurred to me that he believed the dominant narrative and was choosing not to open his mind to the counternarrative. How can I help students open their minds to hear the other side(s)? How can I provide a transformational learning experience from this conversation that occurred? How can we bring the counternarrative into the classroom without anxiety, fear, or retaliation? Where was my nugget from God that evening? Where was God?

**"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."
NIV Bible, 2011, Psalm 34:18**

My aha moment of God being present became clear when I was planning for one of my courses prior to the Fall of 2021. With all the negativity in the world, specifically from anti-movements like, anti-critical race theory, anti-true history, anti-LGBTQIA+ and two spirit, anti-intellectual and anything that had to do with race, gender, counternarratives, and even anti-thinking, I had an epiphany. I am at a faith-based university and for now we have not been directed to remove anything that had to do with race, history or counternarratives of Black, Latino/a, Asian, Tribal Nations, LGBTQIA+, etc. in our courses, I came to the realization that I had an opportunity to make a change at the classroom level. I knew that I would be taking a risk, but I felt it was time to be brave and bold. After all, that is what I share when I do faculty workshops about brave spaces. I needed to walk the walk if I was talking the talk. It was something I believed students and I needed. As I was planning this course, a voice inside kept nudging me to take this opportunity to be innovative, compassionate, and do things differently because we were living in a different world. That voice was God. I know it was him as I felt his presence every time, I opened my laptop to work on this course. My challenges were, "Am I ready to change the way I do things?" "Am I ready to defend this course if anyone complains?" and "Will I be able to get student "buy-in?"

I carefully designed the course so that students' experiences, thoughts, voices, and presence were amplified; where they could share their thinking in an intellectual and caring environment where dialogue and listening with intention were the goals, and where true learning would occur. I incorporated current events into course topics for students to understand how course material can be applied and to see the importance of this course in real time. I also planned a meeting with officers from the San Antonio Police Department and for students to attend an art opening on campus where pictures depicting Black people

and transgender people were displayed. The art opening also included poetry from transgender people who shared their painful experiences of being bullied. The goal was to promote engagement in our learning community and foster deeper, more critical dialogue about education and the things going on in our community, the nation, and the world.

I believe, as Paulo Freire (1970) believes, that "true dialogue cannot exist unless the partners engage in love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking (p. 14). What people may not know is that Paulo Freire participated in Catholic action movements and asserts that his knowledge and development of his ideas are a result of Latin American liberation theologians. This view shows that dialogue demonstrates not only the positive connection between people but also the constant drive to transform themselves as well as reality. Therefore, dialogue becomes the sign and the central concept of true education, "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education" (para. 14). This was my driving force. Freire's teachings would be the foundation of my class.

It took the time to make sure my plans were thought out carefully prior to the start of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, I provided many opportunities for students to share and bounce ideas off each other whenever we were focusing on specific topics. I encouraged all ideas without claiming any individual was incorrect. This helped to establish my supportive role as a facilitator. I wanted to mimic the type of leadership all students could access as they wish. I wanted to create a community of learners where I was also a learner. I strongly believe that teaching is reciprocal, and I learn from my students as they learn from me. In my view, I was a senior scholar, and my students were novice scholars. Basically, this just meant I had more experience with research, teaching, and service along with my credentials. They were novice scholars who were about to earn their credential and partake on their first research journey with their dissertation work.

Although we have seen the term "education post pandemic," I believe we are not in a post pandemic era, but rather we are still experiencing health, social, economic, and political pandemics. So, the challenges I have experienced will not automatically disappear. In fact, we should be using what we learned to reset how we teach and how our students learn. "Business as usual did not work." In fact, it caused more trauma for students. Doing things, "business as usual," is a violent act toward others who are aware of what is going on in the world and are seeking help in making sense and finding meaning in all of it.

Reflecting on the experiences I shared above and question the presence of God; I now know God was present. During the times when I would stay in class to listen to my students, he was there. It was his presence that kept me focused on what students were sharing. God knows that these long nights would lead to exhaustion, but it was he who provided me the will and energy to stay there and "walk" with my students. Although we were not in a face-to-face classroom, I felt I was right next to my students in their zoom room as they shared their suffering. His presence assured that the students had someone to share their stories about pain, trauma, violence, anxiety, depression, etc. Looking back, I do not know how I did not break down and cry myself. I learned later that semester that it was okay to cry when someone was sharing a death of a family member. They saw my humanity as I shared my vulnerabilities. I believe this is what God wanted to happen. To this day, students will share with me that this was their favorite class so far. I quickly follow up and ask them what it was about it that makes it your favorite class. I often get responses such as, you treated us as equals, you made us feel comfortable, you made us really think about the world and what our role is in it, you opened our eyes, etc.

On days where I lost sleep and meditated, those distractions that kept running through my mind were meant to be. Although I kept calling God, and not hearing me, he was with me the whole time. You see, for me when I meditate, I also pray. Prayer is key to my daily life. I wake up praying, pray during the day, and pray when I am lying in bed. Reflecting on these moments and the day after, it was God who gave me the energy and cleared my mind to make it through the day. The days after no sleep were long days, but it was God who carried me in the palm of his hand. I know that now.

“For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear; I will help you.” NIV Bible, 2011, **Isaiah 41:13.**

The conversation that dealt with “Black Lives Matter,” resolved itself when I came up with a project, I felt would help students share their stories so they can hear the counternarrative and understand why the Black Lives Matter movement was critical. Students were paired with a peer of a different ethnicity. Their charge was to learn about their peers’ identities and if the current civil/social unrest had influenced how they see themselves and others who are culturally different from themselves. Not only were they to interview them for at least an hour, but they were also to collect pictures from their peers that depicted what was most important to them at this moment, e.g., a time of a global pandemic and social/civil unrest. After students completed the project, many went away with new knowledge of their peers as well as their partner’s culture. Additionally, they saw each other as human beings who share similar ideologies and beliefs. That was when I knew God was present—they saw each other as human beings despite their differences in ethnicities, religion, or race. Even the student who said, “All Lives Matter,” shared he now understands why “Black Lives Matter.” This assignment was his “Aha” moment.

“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”
NIV Bible Proverbs 11:25

After these two and a half years, I did not know what my next step would be. After all, I was burnt out, mentally exhausted, and fragmented. Unbeknownst to me, God placed an opportunity in front of me that I did not expect. I have spent many years in a faculty role in institutions located in Arizona, Colorado, and Texas. There were times where I spent half of my time as faculty and ½ my time as an administrator in higher education. An administrative position opened at my institution, and it was calling me. This is where God appeared again. For the longest time I have believed that I needed to work toward tenure and full professorship. We are groomed to believe this is the end all be all if you are in a faculty role. But what if you are not happy in your faculty role because you are burnt out, mentally exhausted, and fragmented? Or because you are treated as if you are incompetent because of what you look like and you refuse to stay in such a toxic environment? When do you say, “enough is enough” and take care of yourself mentally, physically, and spiritually? I prayed for guidance and God nuggets. This is when God made it clear it was time for me to move on. A little voice kept telling me, “Go for it.” I called upon my friends and asked for their advice. They were the messengers of God, providing words of encouragement and love. Reminding me that I have tenure and for most people that is okay, and “You do not have to go any further.” “Who are you doing this for?” “You have got to remove yourself from that toxic environment.” God calls on us to be people who “Clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Col 3:12. This stance of compassion and kindness should be directed both inward (self-compassion) and outward (compassion). I decided to go for it and if it happened, it was meant to be because God meant it to be. He knows what I have been experiencing and he knows I can influence change at a different level and on a different path.

CONCLUSION

When there is a storm occurring and you are looking for peace, you will not find it immediately, but that does not mean God is not present. It is during the storms and while you are intentionally paying attention to others, is when you will find God. He is right there walking next to you, sometimes carrying you when you need it the most. A global pandemic and social and civil unrest flow into our lives whether we like it or not, especially when you work in higher education. It follows us into the classroom, and we do not leave it at the door, nor do our students. Questioning whether God was on campus is something that we experienced because the ugliness of the world seeped into our classrooms. Dehumanization of people became the dominant narrative, especially when it came to police brutality that resulted in the murders of Black men and women. Seeing masses of poor brown and Black people dying because of COVID shown a bright light at the inequities that exist, not only in healthcare, but in education, housing, etc.; the inhumanity of government regulations and policies became clear. What our students experienced is what most of us experienced too. Reflecting on our experiences, God made sure we could help others while at the same time he helped us, by keeping us near him, carrying us when we were exhausted, and listening to our prayers. It is so easy to lose faith when you are in the middle of a storm like we continue to live in.

However, He says, “for where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20). When we begin to recognize the storms rising in our life or others. When we begin to ask where is He and what is his plan? Our immediate response, as taught to us through Catholic Social teaching, should be to look inside. Reflect on those difficult times in the past when we thought we wouldn’t make it through and yet here we stand. Reflect on the challenges previous generations struggled through and unspeakable burdens bore so that here we stand. I sincerely believe when we seek God through the questions, we ask He always answers. Here we asked is God still on campus. His response was yes because I am within you. We ask where is He in all of this, and His answer was “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you, I will help you”. We believe He will do the same for all that ask.

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