

Catholic survival guide



I keep thinking that the “survival guide” to living in these times of scandal and anxiety are the sacraments, of course, and praying the Liturgy of the Hours – the prayer of the Church that priests and consecrated people pray. Then I wake up and face another day, and there is the wisdom of the Church helping me through again.

That’s been so incredibly clear, especially in recent weeks, as there have been readings from St. Augustine on bishops and pastors. Some are absolutely about bishops and pastors. Many apply to us all. Consider:

“Some men continually strive for all the goods of the world, the goods that are so evident on the face of the earth; yes, they love and prize them. They do not want to die, to have their lives buried in Christ. Over the entire face of the earth: such men love earthly things; moreover, such straying sheep are to be found over the entire face of the earth. They dwell in different places, but one mother, pride, has given birth to them all, just as one mother, our Catholic Church, has given birth to all faithful Christians scattered over the whole world.”

It continues: “Small wonder that pride gives birth to division, and love to unity.”

I watch this dynamic play out on Twitter all the time. It seems to bring out the worst in us. Division is exaggerated and encouraged. Pride tries to outdo itself. Negative feedback only makes it all worse. It’s like a microcosm of life. It seems to exist to make it all worse.

That’s part of the wisdom of the Liturgy of the Hours. Stop and pray. Throughout the day. Never be far from God. Morning Prayer. Midmorning Prayer. Midday Prayer. Right through to

evening and night. The Psalms! There's no emotion under the sun they have not expressed.

Praying with the Church, you feel less alone, less crazy, less like everything is falling apart – and confident that even if everything you know and love and found security in is collapsing, that's alright, because God is the rock and stronghold we should be placing all our trust in. Everything everybody good and holy has ever said about practical atheism really is true.

We often live as if God doesn't exist, as if we can't rely on him, insisting on making our way by ourselves and failing terribly at it. These times call out our unbelief and call us to conversion once and for all, day after day, hour by hour.

As Augustine says: "She calls the stray sheep back, however, because the Apostle said in reference to the broken branches: *God has the power to graft them on again*. Call them sheep straying from the flock or branches cut off from the vine, God is equally capable of calling back the sheep or of grafting the branches on again, for he is equally the chief shepherd and the true farmer. *And they were scattered over the entire face of the earth, and there was no one to search for them, no one to call them back*, that is to say, no one among those wicked shepherds."

We need good shepherds to call back us straying sheep, to help restore our confidence – and we have so many of them. We also all need to be playing our parts. Seek Christ always, only, everyday. People will see. It will make a difference. And the Church helps. If you're mad at news headlines, consider your own heart. Are you contributing to division?

There's an app or two for the Liturgy of the Hours and super-short adaptations that Magnificat, for instance, puts out. Any routine of prayer is important, but plug into what the Church provides. Dip in and out. It's providential care. Pray it with

love and gratitude will grow. And we'll cling to God alone better together.

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