



By the grace of God, I have fully recovered from COVID-19. I am healthy, and I wholeheartedly thank you for your prayers and support. After going through 15 days in quarantine, I would say that it was a wonderful time to experience God's love and your love in a deeper and special way.

However, it was not the case when I tested positive on November 14! On the one hand, I thanked God that since symptoms started, I did not have public Masses and hopefully did not spread the virus. On the other hand, I was scared, confused, and troubled about so many things. It was painful to learn that for the next 15 days, I would not be celebrating Mass in public; I would not be hearing confessions; I would not be preaching; I would not be going to school and meeting 4th and 5th graders; I would not be visiting you in your homes; nor would I be sitting with you for dinner/coffee; I would not be meeting/talking with you.

Moreover, I contemplated informing my parents in India. If they came to know, how would they react to the news? I thought it was going to be very hard. But God calmed all my fears and anxieties and delivered me.

On November 14, when my quarantine began, I worried about how I would say Mass. Fr. Richard helped me by giving me his Mass kit and asked me celebrate inside my room. Straight away my living room became my chapel and my couch became an altar. All these days I became the reader, server, participant, and the main celebrant. I was also brought closer to Jesus through various spiritual exercises. I did spiritual readings, long scripture readings, and memorized Bible passages in addition to celebrating Mass and praying my regular prayers.

Being the Associate Pastor of OLMC gave me the opportunity to experience your great care and deep concern. You showed me God's abundant love by generously praying for me in your personal prayers and in public. Chapel visits, Mass intentions, as well as home, school, and group prayers helped my quick recovery.

Ever since I started my quarantine, I received on my phone, computer, and in the mail box prayers for my speedy recovery, best wishes, and prayer cards. It was comforting to hear the message, "We are praying for you, Fr. Joe. You will be alright soon. Don't worry!"

Besides the assurance of prayers, most of the text messages came with these three questions (which made me smile): "Do you need anything? Do you have any cravings? What's your favorite food?" I received dozens of varieties of food such as barbeque, chicken, fish, chilli pepper water, soup, brownies, rice, cookies, and so on. Some went to the extent of cooking for me Indian food. (Of course I can't forget the Indian parishioners who cooked and brought Indian food!) It is unbelievable. All that you have done for me is incredible and invaluable. God worked through you all beyond my imagination. God's promise is found in the scripture that, "if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward."

I was very fortunate that the three priests in the rectory (reminds me of Trinity God) showed me extraordinary care. Fr. Dan constantly kept an eye on me, providing for me all things at regular intervals: food, fruit, snacks, water, and so on. For my breakfast, Frs. Richard and De Oreo prepared delicious smoothies every day. Both became professionals at it! Gina, the rectory housekeeper, took care of me in many ways. In fact, all four of them made huge sacrifices in this process and risked so much. And Dr. Cynthia and Mel from the Trinity Free Clinic constantly monitored my health, guiding me and helping me recover fast. I have no words to thank them. What a privilege God gifted me with in this quarantine.

For my media ministry, this quarantine has given me plenty of time to make more videos about saint lives and histories. I studied, then wrote and created the videos for Sts. Leo, Francis Xavier Cabirini, Cecilia, and John Berchmans. I uploaded the videos to my YouTube channel (channel name: Punithargal Saints).

Just like how the Israelites experienced God's amazing protection in the midst of dangers and harmful things, I also experienced this in the same way when I was going through the fearful COVID these past 15 days. God really kept me as the apple of His Eye. Even though I walked through the valley of darkness, I feared no evil.

As the scripture says in Isaiah 43:2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not consume you." This has been my profound experience. I experienced in each and every moment God's presence and help!



- Fr. Joe Vargese