



Reflections

The benefit of laughter amidst misery

ALTHOUGH there has been a huge sigh of relief at the easing of complete lockdown, the fear of a second wave of Covid-19 depresses our pent-up enthusiasm and plans for enjoying the warm weather.

This pandemic has certainly brought an unprecedented level of damage to every aspect of our lives. My thoughts and prayers are with those affected by the virus, but amidst all this loss and against the odds we need to move on. To make that happen we must draw inspi-

ration from all the available resources — and these may feel rather scarce now and depleted by the ongoing virus situation.

Laughter is one resource among the few that are left. Lord Byron once said: 'Always laugh when you can, it is cheap medicine.'

In the face of this unparalleled pandemic, laughter might seem an untimely and insensitive joke. Yet it seems that nothing else around us at the moment is more viable than this readily available and effective tool.

'To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain, and play with it,' said Charlie Chaplin.

A few months ago someone said to me: "Don't worry, the coronavirus won't last long — it's made in China!"

When asked why President Trump refused to wear a face-mask back in May, the explanation was, 'The virus won't attack him since he has a diplomatic immunity'.

Along with laughter, I found such lighthearted comments eased my nervousness and strengthened my resolve to stay

safe.

Advances in neuroscience have unravelled the secrets of the benefits of laughter. Through laughter the release of endorphins, our body's natural feel-good chemicals, promotes an overall sense of well-being. Laughter increases our immunity, lowers levels of the stress hormone cortisol leading to relaxation of our muscles, decreases pain and can prevent serious diseases such as heart attack and stroke. Laughter eases anxiety and tension and improves mood and bonding.

Laughter is contagious and can help us quickly connect with other people. Social distancing and face masks create a challenge in sharing laughter with others face-to-face. However, we can make it possible by taking ourselves to God from the confines of our own houses. 'He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy' (Job 8:21).

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