

# *Living Alone*



“Where is everyone?” There are times in our lives when we find ourselves living alone. Those close to us may have died or moved away—or we have shifted to a ‘solitary place’. As Christians we know we are never alone, we are with Christ who loves us and never leaves us. But it does not always feel like that.

It takes some adjusting to live alone—even with Christ. We naturally want to belong to a family or group where we are valued and have a place by right which we do not have to earn. In the Church family we belong because of our re-birth through the waters of baptism. We are children of God, members of Christ and inheritors of God’s kingdom. When we start to claim this identity, we discover we are expected to behave in certain ways.

Whether we live alone or not, as followers of Jesus, we are called to share the love of God with others. To assist us in this work we receive the Holy Spirit, the life force of God's love, to guide and strengthen us. It is the Holy Spirit that works through us in our prayer, Bible study, and our life of worship and ministry to others.

When we pray to God, we might use some of the prayers in our Prayer Book for Morning and Evening Prayer. In this way we unite ourselves with others praying the same words. We can also share our day with God/Jesus, by talking, singing, listening or just resting quietly together in friendship. Times alone are opportunities for us, like they were for Jesus, to develop our relationship with God.

In our prayer we have a responsibility to pray for others, especially those who are grieving or coping with an illness. They are, with us, part of God's family, God's loved creation, which is suffering and we suffer with them. We may also be led to offer practical actions of care.

To help us in our Christian life, we can read our Bible alone or in a group with others. When living alone we might like to reflect on the Sunday Gospel. This reading often describes how Jesus lived a life of love in 1st century Palestine. We have the task of discovering how such love might be lived out by us where we are in 21st century Australia. How, for example, are we to respond to the treatment by Australia of refugees, an injustice we might notice or an unexpected demand made on us by another? God's love is always the same, but it will be expressed differently in different places and times.

One of the benefits of living with others, is being able to discuss with them ideas, joys, and problems. Another, is the way it continually challenges us to consider others and not just ourselves. When decisions are made by more than one person compromises may be needed, even when just determining what and when we eat each day!

Being on our own can foster spiritual growth and exciting creativity, but we also tend to develop fixed ideas and set ways of organising our home life.

For us who live alone, the Church family may provide the support and friendship that helps us to be more open and gentle in relationships. If it does, we need to accept this gift with thankfulness, respect and love, realising, as in any family, we are all different and no one is perfect!

Taking part in the ministry of the Church enables us to give and receive help from one another. Friendships develop as we encourage and show gratitude to each other, especially to those performing a generous service, starting new work, or struggling with failure. A chance meeting or phone call may be an opportunity for offering support to others in their Christian journey.

As well as people, God uses music, all the arts, the books we read, and the rest of the creation to support us. Through animals, birds, the beauty of nature or the pleasure and satisfaction of gardening we can experience something of God's love for us and delight in us.

We who are older and living alone, might at times feel vulnerable and frightened, but as our relationship with Christ grows within us we develop an awareness of God's peace. Being alone then may become a time of spiritual growth and creativity. Each day can be welcomed as full of the known and unknown (to us) love of God in which everything else, all the joys, hopes, fears and sufferings of our world, take place.

Jesus said, "I am with you always", and he meant it. He imaged himself as a grapevine, the whole plant, and we as the living branches of that vine. Also, Jesus said, that like a hen, he longs for us to shelter under his/'her' wings.

At Holy Communion, we receive the bread and wine, sharing together the same food and drink, the body and blood of Jesus. His life becomes part of the life of each of us, binding us to him and one another.

Whether living alone or with others, we belong to God's family. We, are the 'sheep', known and loved by Jesus our 'good shepherd'. His Spirit guides us each day as we take part in Christ's work of love for all in our world.

*Sister Helen CSC, May 2018.*