

Serenity Prayer

Personal Reflection

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Reinhold Niebuhr

The title of the prayer is only part of its meaning – it is a prayer for other things too. We can use it to reflect on where we are and how we feel about the abuse scandal and its cover-up. Let us take it one phrase at a time.

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change...*

In some ways, this is the hardest part – serenity in the face of what cannot be changed. There are so many things that we wish had not happened. We are angry with the people who did awful things to children and to others they were trusted to care for. We are ashamed to be part of the Church where these things have happened – and yet we love it. We want to say to those who have been hurt just how much we care about them and wish they had not experienced what they did. We can feel powerless and frustrated. We can become fearful of how our care for others could be misinterpreted. And all because of things we cannot change.

What are the things that you desperately want to change but cannot?

Be honest with God and name them.

Try one or more of these ideas.

- Write down the things you cannot change– add to them as you think of them – perhaps over a few days.
- Create a mind-map and jot them down or do little sketches to illustrate them.
- Go for a ‘frustration walk’ or dig the garden – something active. As you walk or work, allow the frustrations to surface. Do not rush them – allow them to surface.
- Use this adaptation of Psalm 130, Out of the depths as a mantra or inspiration for art or photography.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

Or

Out of the depths of (name the deep emotion) I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

Listen to me!

Do not turn your ear away from what I have to say to you.

- Listen to and pray with this version of *Out of the Depths*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqelCmfiGnU>
 - What do you cry out to the Lord for at this time? Who do you want to cry out to the Lord for?
- What emotion is your biggest obstacle to accepting what you cannot change?

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God, grant me the courage to change the things I can.

We cannot change everything – but there is always something we can change for the better. Come before God with your hopes and dreams for things to be better now and in the future. At this stage, do not limit yourself to what is obvious and ‘practical’. As before – use words or a mind-map, art or photography to explore the theme.

- What are the changes you would really like to see?
- What (or who) needs to change in order to bring those hopes and dreams to fruition?
- How do you need to change? Think about things like –
 - Deepen belief that God is on our side and trust in the power of prayer.
 - Learn more about what happened and what enabled it to happen.
 - Learn more about attentive or intentional listening and practise it.
 - Be more aware that survivors are in our midst – but may not want this to be public knowledge. How might this affect how you treat people?
 - How can you help to create a culture of acceptance and love so that everyone is valued and feels safe?

You may find that one particular change comes up as something for you to act on. How will you do this?

God, grant me the wisdom to know the difference.

There are things we cannot change however much we want to.

There are things that we can change but may need to find the courage to make the change.

Ponder on this last line.

- How do we determine what cannot be changed and what can?
- How do we identify when something is ours to change – and when we just have to step back and trust that God will prompt the right person to do it?
- How might we support the ‘right person’ even when we ourselves want to be the one making the difference?
- Which is hardest for you – to accept things that cannot be changed or finding the courage to change the things you can – and should?

Now pray the whole prayer, taking time at the end of each phrase to talk to God about what you have reflected on.

Think about how you might use this prayer when you are confronted with feelings about a parish situation or news story about abuse and its aftermath or examples of cover-up.

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Reinhold Niebuhr

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