

Where is God and why is he letting this happen? A question from a 4th grade student.

Today's kids face situations that many of us never faced when we were kids. School shootings, terrorist attacks, tsunamis and other natural disasters, and now, the corona virus. A few weeks ago, someone emailed Father with this question. The email said: *From a parent's perspective, I know one thing that has been harder to speak about with some of my kids who are younger, is **how do we explain why God is letting this happen?** My 4th grader is struggling with this. She really believes we had to do something wrong and tends to believe this is some sort of punishment. I try to explain to her that God loves everybody and wants none of us to suffer. I struggle though with this topic a lot. It's a hard reality, and hard to justify. It's hard not to question why we can't all be saved and really hard to explain this to young ones!* This is a difficult and challenging question to answer. Here is Father Dave's response: Thank you for this email. Of course, you would ask the most difficult question that Christianity ever has to answer. How does an all good and all-powerful God allow evil in the world? It is difficult enough to answer for adults but is even more difficult for children.

As far as the first question goes for children, I would use the analogy of a parent. Can a parent prevent all harm to their children? No. Parents love their children completely and fully while trying to do everything that they can do for them but there are things that they cannot protect their children from and times that parents will do bad things to their children because they are imperfect. Although God is not imperfect and is perfect love, God cannot protect us from everything because in creating the physical world, He had to create something other than himself which could not be perfect. The world created by God has its own laws and rules that it follows. God does the best that God can do to help us through what happens in this world. The most important thing in this world is our relationship with our God whatever is happening. People die in war, crime, poverty and so many other horrible things in this world. It is evil and awful, horrible and unthinkable. It should not happen. Most of it is the sinfulness of human beings. In the midst of all of that, God shares his love and promises that His love will always be there, his relationship with us will not end and that we can live with him forever in the next life as well. It is a difficult situation and hard for children to understand. The first part of the answer is the best.

As far as everyone not being saved: there is another answer. The Catholic Church does teach that there is a possibility that everyone is saved in the end. The unconditional and perfect love of God is so great that there is a possibility that no one can turn down that love once we die and come face to face with God. The important thing is that we open up to God's grace as soon and as much as we possibly can in this life.

Here are some thoughts that I have when talking with your children. I believe as parents and church leaders; we must be prepared to answer all types of questions. We must be proactive and walk with our kiddos through difficult times...having age appropriate conversations about what's happening. Let's look at some points you can use to explore this question with kids.

- **First, ask the child what is happening and ask how he or she feels about it.** This will give you a good sense of how much they already know, and you can correct any misconceptions they may have.
- **Ask the child to be honest about their fears.** Are they afraid? Are they stressed? Are they worried? What do they know or understand about the virus at this point? Listen to the child and be emphatic with any concerns he or she may have. Keep a calm voice. Let the child know you are there to help protect them and keep them safe and healthy. Let them know lots of people like scientists and doctors are working to keep us safe.
- **Keep a positive attitude.** Be honest. Keep the updates about what is happening to a minimum. If you constantly talk about it, it can begin to feel like impending doom is about to happen. Less is more for some kids when talking about something of this magnitude.

- **Keep balance in your conversation.** Share what is happening, but also share the proactive things that are being done and specifically what they can do to help. Remind them they can take steps like washing their hands, not sharing drinks, etc.
- **And while we wait for Jesus to return, we have a promise that God is always with us.** God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He is with us in the good times and the bad times. He is always, there to love us. When bad things like the virus happens, we want God to wave a magic wand and make the virus go away immediately. But it's not always like that. Sometimes we have to go through the tough times like everyone else. But the difference for us as believers is the fact that Jesus is with us and understands how we feel. He also felt hurt and pain when He died on the cross for our sins.
- **As followers of Jesus, we also have other believers who encourage us and walk with us through the tough times.** That's why it is so important to stay connected to the church and have friends there who can help us and guide us. That's what the church does. We support and care for each other.
- **We can also think about all the good things God allows to happen to us as well.** We have food to eat, a place to sleep, people around us who love us and so many other great blessings God brings to us.

Our prayer is that we can raise children who have a deep faith that trusts in God in the good times and the "bad" times that come with living in this world.

Don't hesitate to write or call with any questions you may have. We are here for you.

God Bless +
Mary Van Schyndel