

## Landry: We need to pray that social isolation and pandemic changes a life forever – starting with our own



Life is filled with wake-up calls. For most of us, each day begins with the sound of an alarm ringing, and the challenge for most of us is to simply get up in response to that alarm. St. Josemaria Escriva calls this moment the “heroic minute”: **“It is the time fixed for getting up. Without hesitation: a supernatural reflection and ... up! The heroic minute: here you have a mortification that strengthens your will and does no harm to your body. If, with God’s help, you conquer yourself, you will be well ahead for the rest of the day. It’s so discouraging to find oneself beaten at the first skirmish.”**

We don’t only deal with literal wake-up calls, there are many we face on a regular basis that are much more figurative, like a health crisis or the death of a loved one. But these too, offer us the opportunity for a ‘heroic minute’ – that at the moment we realize we’re facing a wake-up call, we need to offer a supernatural reflection and then get up. I realize that those are easy words to write but much harder words to live. This is why we draw inspiration from the stories of saints and others who have used their wakeup calls as the launching point for some heroic virtue.

One such heroic wakeup call is the story of [Zach Sobiech](#), a young man diagnosed with terminal bone cancer. While Zach died in May 2013, he had some very honest words about his own wake-up call:

**"I think every teenager out there feels invincible and they'll never admit it, and it's not the kind of invincible like Superman, it's the kind of invincible like 'I'll see you in five months.' I thought I was invincible. I was ready for college... and I was planning out way ahead and it turns out sometimes you can't do that."**

To their credit, Zach's whole family embraced this painful wake-up call and did something heroic with it. Zach's mom, Laura, speaks of the prayer she prayed when she realized Zach's cancer was terminal: "OK, Lord, you can have him. But if he must die, I want it to be for something big. I want someone's life to be changed forever." Her book, [Fly a Little Higher](#), describes the many ways God answered this prayer – something she continues to write and speak about to this day.

Over the past week, I've found myself thinking of Zach's words. All of my plans have been cancelled or put on hold. While I'm genuinely hoping that this crisis will pass and my life will return to normal in a few weeks or months, I'm having to come to grips with the fact that this crisis is going to last awhile, and the effects are going to be widespread.

To put it simply: we're collectively living the sort of wake-up call that hasn't been seen in a generation, perhaps since the time of the Second World War. And with each daily update we are faced with a reminder that neither we nor those we love are invincible.

But, much like the Sobiech family and countless others who've experienced a painful wakeup call, the question needs to become what now? What are we being awakened to be and to do? I think, like Zach's mom Laura, we need to pray that this experience of social isolation and pandemic might become one that changes a life forever – first of all my life and yours.

The starting point for this is simple: we need to pray. While there is good content to be found on streaming services (provided we are discriminating about what we watch), if we come out of this time with our only accomplishment being the number of shows we've watched, I think we've failed in our heroic minute. The chief argument most of us have about developing a life of prayer is that we don't have enough time... for most of us in these days, that excuse is no longer valid. If anything, many of us are finding that we have too much time on our hands. We need to embrace this opportunity, as Bishop Robert Barron suggests, [to seek God out in the silence](#). Priests and lay ministers alike are pivoting to make adapt their ministries to our present circumstances, so you might seek out the daily Mass streamed online. But even without those, you might find your Bible and Rosary and put them to good use. I can't encourage you enough: make a concerted effort to establish or expand your interior life during this season.

From there, we need to learn to love our neighbour. For many of us, this starts in our own homes, with spouses, children, and roommates. Life in community is going to be hard as we find ourselves staring at the same faces day after day.

But there's a reason God calls people into community – families, religious communities, and the Church – and that is because community builds sanctity. As we learn to pay better attention to those we live with, we will be given the opportunity to become more like Christ. To look out for the needs of others. To discover (or re-discover) the ways in which we can share life together. I'm hearing about couples who played a board game or went for a walk outside, parents who are sharing favourite stories or movies with their children, and kids who are getting parents (who might otherwise have been far too busy) down on their hands and knees building Lego or playing some other game.

That being said, loving our neighbour goes beyond the walls of our homes. In a hyper-connected age, we have the ability to check in on friends and relatives and see how they are doing. We should do this by every means we have at our disposal: sending cards, emails, and text messages, and making time for phone calls and video chats with those we love but don't get to see during these days. And we need to especially consider those in need at this time. If we still have the means, we need to continue our donations to the Church and to charities. We need to be mindful of our literal neighbours who might be older or ill, and who as a result are going to have a challenge getting things like groceries. While being mindful of the directives we're receiving from our civic authorities, we need to do what we can to look out for those around us.

The thing about wake-up calls is that they are essentially impossible to ignore, as they jostle you out of your ordinary way of living. But at the same time, most of our alarms come equipped with a snooze feature, allowing us the opportunity to ignore the alarm until a more opportune time. What stands out to me about the Sobiech family is that the way in which they answered their wakeup call left a lasting imprint not only on them, but on the world around them. May our response to this wakeup call become heroic just as theirs was.

**“Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” -Romans 13:11-12**

*– Mike Landry is chaplain to [Evergreen Catholic Schools](#) west of Edmonton, and serves as an occasional guest speaker and music minister in communities across Western Canada. Mike and his wife Jennifer live in Stony Plain, Alta. with their five children.*