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PASTORAL LETTER – September 2021

Dear friend,

We recently held a Sunday worship service that demonstrated a special sensitivity to 9-11. We recognized how this tragic event will forever be embossed in our collective memory and national history.

My sermon's focus was on the resilience of our nation, which helped us rebuild our lives and reclaim our fundamental freedoms. My sermon drew from scientific research about how resilience manifests itself in the lives of people who have experienced trauma, and it looked at the life of Paul the Apostle, a man beset by health, financial, and work-related problems.

For this month's pastoral letter, I am going to share excerpts from my sermon. My aim is that the words below will offer us new insights to living a resilient life.

It is important to recognize that nature has equipped each one of us with a "stress-response system," according to George Bonanno, who has been researching resilience for over 25 years. The key to overcoming a stress or traumatic situation is by developing the proper perception.

Another source expert in the field of resilience is Steven M. Southwick. He is an author and psychiatrist who has studied resilience in cancer patients and prisoners of war. He recommends that we develop a "resiliency toolbox" to cope with life's traumatic events." Based on his research, he said that the tools common to resilient people are 1) optimism (that is also realistic), (2) a moral compass, (3) religious or spiritual beliefs, (4) cognitive and emotional flexibility, and (5) social connectedness.

Paul, who grappled with an undisclosed health condition and a slew of tough problems, would utter a resounding "Amen" in response to Bonanno's and Southwick's words. Paul expressed his resilience by seeking divine help. He prayed to God three times, pleading with God to heal him from an undisclosed, nagging health concern. This health condition was so unrelenting and

annoying that Paul described it as “a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me (2nd Corinthians 12:7-8).” By virtue of praying, Paul is demonstrating that he included spirituality and religion in his “resiliency toolbox.”

Also, Paul conceptualized his stressful situation, and this allowed him to develop the proper insight and approach to life. He was able to discern what his illness was trying to teach him. Developing the proper mental and spiritual attitudes allows us to “interpret traumatic events,” according to research in the field of resilience.

No matter what we face—no matter what has imploded around us—I hope that we never succumb. I hope that we develop the strength and the correct, Gospel-shaped “perception” to rebuild our lives.

Paul recognized that God could give him the inner wisdom and strength to be resilient in the midst of his troubles. God can find a way to make something good come from any stressful and traumatic experiences. He said, “... *for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2nd Corinthians 12: 10).

What tools are in your “resiliency toolbox?”

In Christian friendship,
Pastor Luis

P.S. If you are interested in the sermon, please go to the following link:
<https://youtu.be/9oXTM3p3R40>.
