

## **A Lockdown Spirit**

*by Jun Alindogan*

On the eve before the entire Metro Manila lockdown, I was tutoring a community health nurse on how to rationalize the correct answers to the reading subtest of the Occupational English Test. During the lesson, she informed me that all public health personnel were already given detailed instructions regarding management of protocols during the total lockdown. I dismissed the information as impossible in terms of economic survival of each family and every city. I was skeptical about the whole matter. The following day, Metro Manila was at a standstill. An interagency task force was hurriedly created to determine and initiate intervention to slow down the Covid-19 pandemic which gripped the entire country. People were abruptly caught unaware on how to live. It was mysterious, fleeting, hopeless, ambiguous, and humiliating to be perceived idle and dependent again.

I had mixed thoughts on whether to stay in Montalban, Rizal or go to Gagalangin, Tondo or live with a couple's family in Caloocan. Tondo and Caloocan are dense communities that could trigger faster replication of Covid-19. Montalban is also congested but the villages are mostly far from the town center and may be a little safer from the disease, apart from its rugged terrain that can become my personal deterrent to allergies and respiratory illnesses. My eldest brother based overseas, kept edging me to leave for Sorsogon where a younger brother is settled, for a more rustic and laid-back environment but it was too late. Though quite far from the city, Montalban is still the best location that will protect me from natural struggles with the support of a good church shelter and a familiar neighborhood.

All my days are basically hectic as I provide guidance, encouragement, and inspiration to medically-allied professionals on how to achieve their overseas goals in private coaching sessions which are frequently conducted in small and quiet coffee shops. There are also church-related activities that I must perform in Rizal Province, Quezon City and Navotas every month. Moreover, I look forward to a once-a-week invigorating massage, a delectable yet simple and full dinner with a close friend, and an

interesting and absorbing film to see and at other times, window shop for shoe and bag bargains, and do groceries. The lockdown interrupted the routine and compelled me to consider unconventional options for my indefinite homestay. Obviously, the best medium is technology however inconsistent, weak, strange, and powerless.

Food came first in the paradigm shift. Fast food and small-town eateries had to be replaced with more nutritious and well-balanced home-based meals. I live together with a handful of church members who cook. Cooking is one skill I have never learned to develop as compared to my brothers who have individual specialty dishes. My gift though is a creative direction in telling the cook what kind of dish I would like to eat. The dishes range from salmon kare-kare, potato balls, sardine omelet, tuna roll, spicy and crispy tofu sisig, to meatless noodle soup. Eating together always commemorates kinship, respect, identity, and integrity.

Sleep was another struggle. Late evenings and midnight were regular home arrivals. With the lockdown, sleeping early transformed the house norm. There is something cosmic about sleep that forces us to rethink, restructure, and repair our damaged beings and in the process, become more human again. It was tough to sleep the first week of the lockdown. Another pattern had to be established and adhered to, with a gentle spirit leading me to a more or less physiological and psychological consistency.

In terms of mobility, a basic response must be provided to ease out complications. I live along foothills and since public transport is suspended, walking to and from the nearest mini-wet market is the only option. Generic med stores are located a little farther and so are burger and hotdog chains. There is strength and value when we consider that being mortal is a gracious gift from God.

Leisure had to be relocated indoors. Nothing much can be done about this except watch old films or reruns of the judgmental segment of *Eat Bulaga*. Mobile games do provide temporary relief but boredom can easily set in with more enduring, highly sophisticated, and technological savvy characters that are flat and stereotypical. Reading

books is a dependable and efficient companion. Passivity is not at all novel but rather is a part of our total commitment to being whole and relational to ourselves in any period.

Community involvement had to go. I serve as an overseer to mobile teachers, handling modules for Alternative education learners. The program has brought me to Teresa and Antipolo, Rizal and other rural areas for a possible collaboration. How can social infrastructure be justified in the light of such a pandemic? No single structure has the answer but the response can be framed through a historical lens with a universal, communal, and systematic narrative.

Any community engagement involves some form of giving. In the church that I serve, giving to the community may constitute corruption if the church becomes a conduit of government aid. This was a personal experience when a casual municipal employee and friend who is also a church member, asked for photos of a church feeding program, wholly supported by private individuals, to post a public online thank-you-note to the mayor who did not shell out a single centavo for the program. This friend was the one who thought of the feeding program with the assurance of government help but no funds came on or before the scheduled day. I initiated the program from my own pocket that perhaps, in time, money will come from different sources. This proved true as we conducted breakfast feeding of chicken porridge, chicken noodle soup, champorado, and pancit alternately in different blocks in the community on different days. Kindness can be tapped through a transparent program and a term of reference for individual and community redemption.

The pandemic has also manifested the diverse forms and processes of evil, and so, a full revelation is necessary to combat them. Being able to offer spiritual alternatives grounded on sound social and theological formulations must take precedence over any type of giving or relief.

Finally each era has its own spirit of distortion that culminates in a desire for coherence and breakthrough. It is partially through a series of false assumptions that hope and truth can be achieved.