

# 'Give it a go' - 'Echale Ganas'

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The Spirit in Covid times - Brownsville

Tony O'Connor sm, writes from Brownsville, on the USA-Mexico border: You know that the pandemic is affecting you when you wake at 3.00 am every morning with a frog in your throat and butterflies in your tummy. You are even more sure of this when someone says to you "We will get over this and things will get better" and your arms spontaneously float up to the skies in a gesture of praise and as a great sense of gratitude and relief fills your heart. But apart from that, every day you "Echale ganas" "Give it a go" "give everything a go".

The article with national coverage **"Neither a hurricane nor this pandemic stopped this confirmation"** - <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2020/07/neither-a-hurricane-nor-a-pandemic-stopped-this-texas-confirmation/> was Bishop Flores 's way of speaking of hope and affirming our people's ability to " give things a go" ("echale ganas") and indeed how the "Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness" "intercedes with inexpressible groaning"( Rom 8 26- 27)

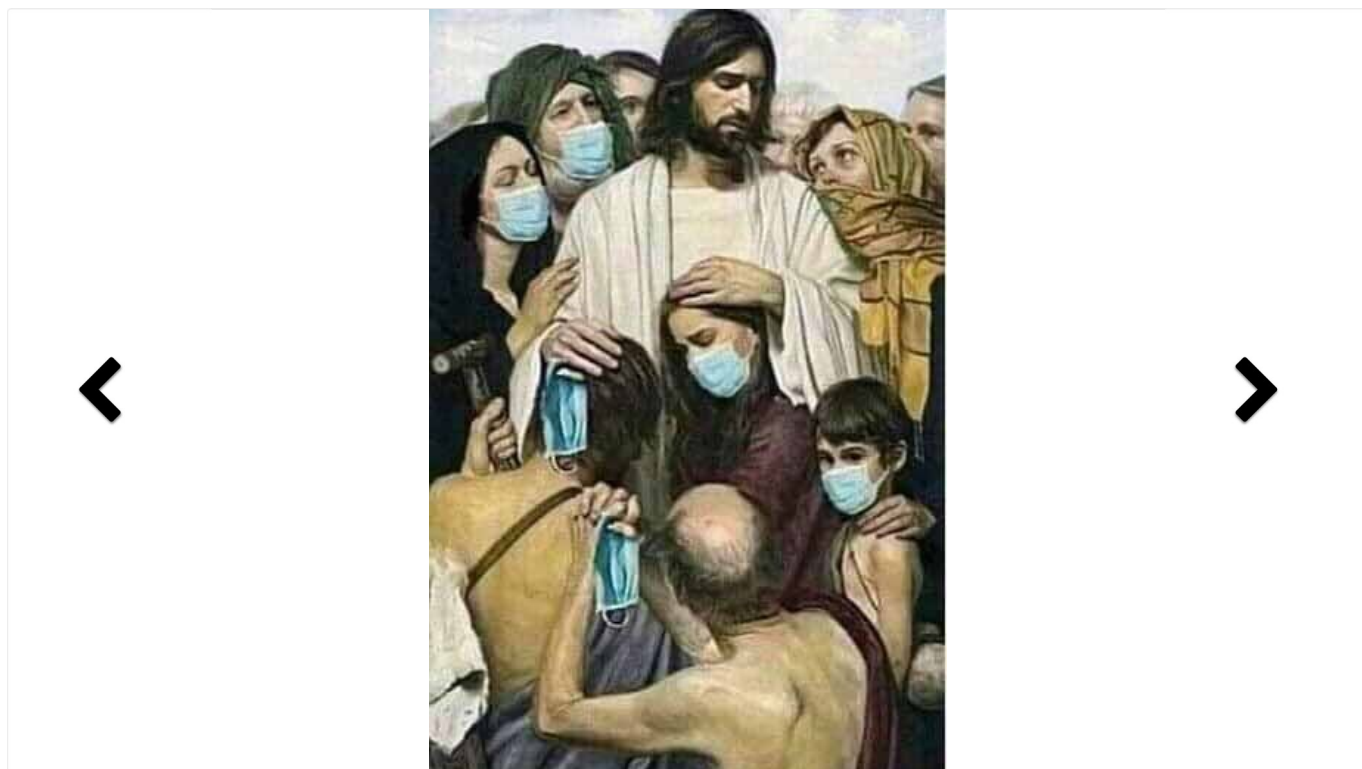
But it is not just about trying to let your faith be stronger than your fear. It is about the struggle to get there , the many other inconveniences and setbacks on the way.

What the bishop did not tell the reporter was that there should have been 18 young people but some could not come because a tornado had swept through their neighborhood and others had just got COVID 19 or had family grappling with it leaving all "grounded."



**Margarita**, an elderly parishioner came to mass on Tuesdays with her walker, accompanied by her husband and a special needs son. From the COVID Ward in Valley Baptist Hospital we accompanied her until she died. First it was the phone calls. She always said how much peace she was feeling. How she trusted in God and that all was well. Then when they put her on a ventilator it was at mass that we prayed. Each night her family would gather under her hospital window and pray the rosary. She was blessed. Her son a doctor could be there and place the phone near her ear so she could hear the Hail Mary's. She has been gone now a week and the family is still waiting not for a burial but for cremation.

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**Mayra** did not have COVID 19 . Her sciatic nerve stopped her from standing up straight. When she finally went to the doctor she fell, had a stroke, was rushed to the hospital but was declared dead. Mayra was leader of a CEB, a minister of the Eucharist, apostle of the sick and the bereaved. From Salvador. Many years ago,she had been carried by the current and done permanent damage to her hip crossing the Rio Grande with coyotes. The family await the release of her body from a refrigerated truck so as to give the Christian burial she deserves well over two weeks after her death.

**A COVID 19 Funeral** can be very very unsettling. The deceased has died alone without loved ones holding their hand. The loved ones may have looked up at a hospital window but were not been able to physically and mentally say good bye. Then at the funeral parlor if there was a brief stay the coffin was actually locked and only when it arrived at the cemetery the definitiveness of it all would hit with weeping and wailing and holding onto the coffin and almost jumping into that dark deep pit. Covid 19 is a cruel and evil virus ,not allowing the normal processes of human dying and grieving and letting go. The ashes are not much more helpful and the paper work to cross to Mexico to bury there can drive anyone to drink.

Then there is **Maria**, 17 years old, in one of the confirmation groups confirmed by me two weeks ago. She could not sleep alone, always with her mum, the lights on least she see images of the Santa Muerte (Saint Death). She is not the only one but often there are cases of what could be a certain interference , not just the fear and stress at all this pandemic, locked up at home, no physical school, so many changes to life patterns. Nasty dreams that don't make sense and daytime lights and shadows are maybe part of that or something else? In the darkness of the pandemic I suspect there is another darkness as well. Bless the house and with faith and it can sort of go away?



Santa Muerte (Saint Death)

Then there is little **Martin** who has no birth certificate and **Rodrigo and Martha** who want to get married but can't get a marriage license. In shut down they are not issuing such in this time. **I myself** with no legal papers, no work permit nor green card because my permissions have run out and the new ones have not come. The bishop has removed me as pastor as I can't be "employed" without a government permit. I can stay until they say that I can't. So meantime a happy volunteer under a temporary administrator of san Felipe de Jesus, the pastor from up the road..

Across the river in Mexico, the **asylum seekers** still live down by the river. Their citations for court appearances are postponed continually, and COVID 19 is attacking them just as it is anyone else. Not many people these days can cross the bridges but some people of confidence from this side can take cash from us to other friends that help the migrants with basic necessities. It is not much but is something.



An hour up the road the only **central American minors** are in hotels with their parents and even though a judge has decreed that they can go free, their parents can't so the decree is not enforceable. How can you legally separate kids from their parents?

Down the road at **Fox Hollow del Rio** where we used to go to do celebrations for the elderly every Friday, 11 have died and await as well their turn for cremation or burial, This home is not the hardest hit in Brownsville by any means.

**Young people** seem to be falling now and once a child is sick the whole family has to isolate two weeks take tests it gets very complicated.

There are many people who don't really respect the protocols out of ignorance or just maybe because they don't care .I believe the protocols are the practical ways that we can keep the Christian commandment to love God and neighbor as one's self. Masks and distancing are slowly becoming a way of life.

In all the first communions , confirmations that I officiated at I was able to say to the kids that they will be able to tell their own kids and grand kids that they were baptized, or confirmed or made their first communion in a full blown pandemic with the unique experience of wearing masks and being six feet apart .



One thing we are able to do is be the point of **distribution of food**. With loss of work the basic necessities become a difficulty to attain, especially food. We find ourselves distributing food that we receive from agencies. It is a source of satisfaction to do this even if we are out so often in the hot Texan sun for 4-5 hours. As well we can prepare 150 daily meals for elderly and youth in risk. The hurricane bringing down electricity systems has closed some outlets.



The routine of crossing the river seems to continue .We were praying for someone's brother who had disappeared crossing the river. The **Coyotes** had lost him in the strong current. But thank God he floated up on the right side and after having been deported is back again with his family "echandole ganas"

**"ALWAYS GIVE THINGS A GO'.**

**Photos M, N,**



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