

IN TEMPO DI CORONAVIRUS
IN CORONAVIRUS TIME

It is difficult to describe the situation in which Italy finds itself at this very difficult time. As the country became affected by the virus during the month of February, the epidemic seemed at first to be limited to Northern Italy. The virus then began to spread to many other areas of our peninsula, until the civil authorities had to make a drastic decision: everyone stays indoors, everything is closed, except for the grocery stores.

Since March 9, here in Pratola Peligna and throughout Italy, all religious celebrations, Masses, funerals, parish activities and any other activity that could create gatherings of people have been suspended. The churches are open only for personal prayer (although in Rome a total closure has been ordered). Our cities and towns are practically deserted: we must remain confined indoors to avoid the spread of contagion. One can only go out for work or health reasons, for shopping or for urgent needs.

Our role as priests is to do everything we can to keep hope alive in the people. We try to maintain contact, not to make our parishioners feel alone, to invite them to personal and family prayer, especially through the social media. Every day we celebrate the Eucharist with no people present, but we pray for all. We too find ourselves in this situation for the first time and we feel all the weight and responsibility: how long will this terrible episode last? When will we be able to resume our normal life and our daily activities? What will be the social, economic, but also the religious consequences of this paradoxical situation?

I have no precise news about the other Italian communities, yet I believe that we are all in the same situation, because the measures to contain the contagion have been issued for the whole country. The Italian confreres are all well for the moment.

There are signs of hope. The people have welcomed with great dignity and respect the measures that have been given, demonstrating that Italy is a great people. We are all convinced that we will succeed, that everything will pass, that everything will go well and that in a few days we will be able to greet each other again, we will be able to shake hands, give each other the sign of peace and embrace each other again with all possible affection. With God's help.

P. Renato

13 March 2020

It's amazing how things have changed with the presence of the Coronavirus in the parish. Suddenly the overabundant, festive and sometimes somewhat chaotic human presence in our parish has disappeared. What is left? Plenty of time to pray, meditate, tidy up. Increased telephone and online connections. The desire for communion and closeness grows. There are also many requests for financial assistance for the marginalized.

Lord, protect your people. Mary, intercede for us.

Franco Messori

Things are quiet here in Marconia for the time being. There are no cases. Everything is silent. I open the church at 7 in the morning and close it at 8 in the evening. At 8 am, the Marist community gathers in the church to celebrate morning prayer and the Eucharist. There are always two or three people. At 5:00 p.m. I do the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. A few people come, sing the rosary and then Vespers. One feels the need for God and His protection. People are thankful that the church is open as a sign of hope. Stopping by the church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament gives consolation and peace in this time of fear.

May the Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mother help us to be instruments of mercy and hope, in obedience and with humility, as is required of us in this time.

P. Giovanni Danesin

VIRUS-VIRTUS

P Gianni Colosio

In these days of emergency, the towns remind me of De Chirico's paintings, "Piazze d'Italia". Same desert, same silence as in the artist's metaphysical creations. From time to time, solitary and circumspect apparitions (with masks), swallowed up by doors and gates up shortly afterwards. All the people holed up in their homes, in accordance with the guidelines to fight the contagion. We have learned that in the global village (which our world has turned into), whatever happens on the flat above or below has repercussions, almost in real time, in our own dwelling. And just as we measure body temperature (which is frequent these days), we measure, alas, our growing vulnerability.

Of course, knowing that a pandemic is looming over us all is terrifying. Empty streets and squares are filled with melancholy. The casual and fleeting encounters between friends, at a dutiful distance, without handshakes or pats on the back weigh heavily upon us (we are consoled by the thought that, if nothing else, we avoid hypocritical gestures)...

Not all evil comes to harm, our grandparents used to say. The chasm of empty and slowly-moving Time opens up before us, incurable workaholics that we are, and can lead us again to learn about tranquility and silence, to family dialogue (all too often non-existent), to the nourishment of reading (neglected) and, above all, to the opportunity of a serious introspective examination (fallen into oblivion). Lent, our Lent, might just become one of spiritual growth. A biblical "Kairos".

Many will know how to find, even in dark times, superstitious implications (perhaps with a pinch of lightheartedness, which is not bad). We Italians are masters in this. The diligent social *tamtam* suggests a continuous local *flashmob*. At the appointed time, everyone on the balconies and windows starts singing, playing and paying tribute to the sacrifice of the health-care workers subjected to exhausting work-shifts. A way to feel like a community, even if everyone is confined in their own home.

"*Andrà tutto bene*", "everything will be all right," is the recurring slogan on banners, signs, and sheets that cover the city's buildings.

We don't know how long this *perfect storm* will last. I dream that the atmosphere of positivity won't fade away when normality is restored, that the defeated *virus* will persist as the ancient (and rediscovered) *virtus* of the joy of living together.

Like true brothers.

P Gianni Colosio