



MESSAGE OF MGR NOËL SIMARD ON HOLY DAYS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic obliges us to celebrate and live the great mysteries of our Christian faith, celebrated during Holy Week, in a different way. Our guidelines are intended to contribute to the very commendable efforts of governments to achieve the earliest possible resolution of the epidemic. By accepting the rules and behaviours required to avoid contagion, we limit the contagion to others, thus promoting the common good.

The tragedy we are currently experiencing affects our daily lives and all sectors of social life. It forces us to stop and look for meaning not only in the experience we are going through but also in our whole life. It is as if we have entered into a global Lent, into a great universal fast. We are going through a great trial. As we live Holy Week in a different way, let us remember that in Jesus on the cross, it is God who enters our trials and undergoes them with us and for us out of love.

Like Jesus on the cross, who manifests the fragility of the human being and the vulnerability of God, we are invited to place ourselves in the hands of the Father, but with the awareness that we are in solidarity with one another. Surrendering ourselves in this way in trust is not running away from reality. On the contrary, it is to face it by assuming our responsibility and looking to the future with serenity, because we are not alone and we know that through his death and resurrection, Jesus made love and life triumph. With Him we can make the transition to a renewed life and hope for a sunnier tomorrow. It is this joy and promise of resurrection that we experience at Easter.

As Bro Mauro-Giuseppe Leport, Abbot General of the Cistercian Order wrote so well in a letter for this time of the epidemic and dated 15 March 2020: "Every trial passes, sooner or later, but if we live it with love, the wound that the trial opens in our life will remain open, like the Body of the Risen One, as an ever gushing source of compassion".

Our pastoral theme "With charity we're stepping out" may seem inappropriate in the present circumstances. How can we go out when we are confined? Physical barriers can prevent us from "going out" but cannot block the self-exit that we are called to live through different resources and initiatives. It is still possible to support people in hospital or quarantine by phone call, text message, e-mail, a letter or a card in the mail. Wherever possible and in accordance with health and government guidelines, giving a helping hand to relief or economic aid organizations expresses an outing in charity.

Finally, we need to let God's voice enter into us, making room for silence, the sharing of the Word and prayer. In a beautiful song dedicated to Pope Francis and entitled "San Lorenzo", Michel Sardou sings: "All that remains for him is prayer - Francis, on his knees, prays for us". Yes, we are left with the offering of prayer and supplication. We are left with "this poverty of having no other power than to beg with faith" (Bro Mauro-Giuseppe). May our prayer go up to God, especially for all the victims of COVID-19, for all the medical personnel and for the civil authorities!

Through prayer, commitment and going out of ourselves in charity, we can look to the future with confidence and rediscover the love, joy and peace of Easter. Let us continue to remain united in prayer, mutual support and solidarity.

Happy Easter Triduum and Happy Easter!

+ Noel, Bishop