
Coronavirus. All Masses suspended: solitude is not isolation but joint communion

Times of fast-growing emergencies. Our present, daily life bring us back to a time that we read of in ancient chronicles and that we never thought we would have to face. Surveillance, protection, and... disinfection. All this becomes an imperative, for ourselves and for our entire human existence. However, it is not enough. Much else inhabits and upsets our inner self: uncertainty, the instinct to protect ourselves and our loved ones. How can this be done? We are saved by rationality, by mutual unselfish support that doctors and nurses, on the front line, are giving witness to. However, in our souls, we still haven't reached that point beyond which ... we become silent and entrust ourselves to our Creator.

The daily celebration of Mass is suspended and attendance in churches is forbidden. This measure has been adopted by our bishops with wisdom and active sense of citizenship. We are overcome by silence.

But a question remains. The Mass that our brethren priests celebrate in solitude, does it not have a radiating force corresponding to their pain of not being in visible and tangible communion with their faithful? In this dramatic situation, can the faith, that is, the relationship with the Father, take on a hitherto unseen aspect? Being absent and not celebrating, as faithful, with the priest creates a void and entails absence. But faith can fill this void because it recognises another dimension. It's the dimension of communication that has no physical boundaries, no barriers of isolation. The priest who celebrates embraces the entire world, he does not close himself off in his small parish circle, he spreads himself over everyone and everything. The presence of the Son who gives himself to us through bread and wine, becoming His Body and His Blood so that they may become bread and wine for our life, touches everyone, everyone can be present and everyone is touched by the vital Breath of grace. This dimension triumphs over the quarantine, it makes us cross the desert knowing that we have no shortage of water and that the Manna is always with us.

Solitude is not isolation and lack of relationships, solitude is joint communion, in the dimension that brings us closer to each other in our journey, strengthening kinship while facing the ordeal.

Lent is a time of rebirth, of self-awareness, of newness. This time of adversity invites us to new discoveries: as we cannot participate in the celebration of Mass we will finally use all means of communication with intelligent faith and we will be present at the celebration. Listening to the Word is Bread and nourishment. The Lenten readings are even more vivid and captivating, they penetrate and help us by consolidating our hope, our expectation. Let us embrace the Word allowing it to transform us interiorly, to bestow upon us its strength of novelty and courage. The cry of each and every one, spanning the days in silence and forced solitude, flows throughout the world and touches everyone, making us feel united to one another, proceeding a step at a time. Francesco said: *I am caged today, owing to measures against the Coronavirus, but I see you and I am close to you.*

We must participate with him in this new understanding and be close to each other with responsibility, patience, solicitude and solidarity towards those affected, towards health workers, with that sap flowing from the Gospel that is with us.

Francis, all bishops and priests are with us, closer than ever before: *I join my brother bishops in encouraging the faithful to live this difficult moment with the strength of faith, the certainty of hope and*

the fervour of charity. May this Lenten season help us all to give evangelical meaning also to this moment of trial and pain.

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