
Coronavirus: The Rosary for Italy. Fr. Fornos: “The people’s prayers shall not go unheeded”

“More than ever, in this time of uncertainty and pandemic, it’s important to pray for each other, and to put our faith in the Lord. As we know, fear is never a good answer. Compassion is the answer, closeness, opening our hearts to others. The Heart of Jesus is the way”, declared Father **Frederic Fornos**, international Director of the Pope's World Prayer Network, on the day dedicated to prayer for the whole country by the Italian Church, inviting every family, every believer and every religious community to pray the Rosary at home at 9 pm.



What is the strength of prayer in such a difficult time for Italy and the world? Prayer is more essential than ever. Prayer opens our hearts to others, it brings us closer and to share mutual solidarity. Prayer is not thinking or reflecting on ideas. It involves an encounter with the Lord, He who revealed all the depths of His love and mercy in Jesus Christ. When we pray, especially when we listen to the Word of God, our heart gradually becomes more compassionate. **What is the value of reciting the Rosary for a whole country?** The Rosary prayer, with Mary, brings us closer to the Heart of Jesus, because the mysteries of the Rosary, the mysteries of light for example, help us deepen our love for Christ and our desire to follow Him and love Him all the more. By praying the Rosary we learn to love like Him, wherever we are, in healthcare settings for example, with the most vulnerable and the sick, in our families. This prayer helps us rediscover Mary's closeness, leading us to Christ, the true peace that dispels all our worries and gives us the strength to serve. Pope Francis, on the day of prayer "24 Hours for the Lord" 2016, invited us not to forget the strength of prayer of so many people.

Sometimes prayer is restricted to a space of inner peace and an effective antidepressant, but the prayer of intercession offered by a people is extremely propitious.

Yet the fruitfulness of prayer always eludes us. Prayer is like the rain that nourishes the earth and yields fruits (Isaiah 55:10). It operates beyond the visible world, into the very depths of the earth, and gradually, at the most unexpected moment, it comes to light. I have no doubt that its fruitfulness is immense. As the Gospel says, it produces "some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown" (Mk 4:20).



Can the recitation of the Rosary also serve to unite a people? When we pray the Rosary we entrust all our intentions for the world and for others to the care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In these days, our prayer can be full of people: our families and friends, those who suffer most, and all those who are struggling day and night against this pandemic. Surely this prayer brings us closer to one another. **The entire world expects science to respond to the pandemic. So how does God fit into that?** God delivers us from the epidemic of fear and opens our hearts. He is the One who transforms us so we may embrace compassion. As Jesus Christ revealed to us, God bestows the gift of generous service upon countless men and women, who donate themselves at the risk of their own lives, to alleviate suffering, to guarantee the functioning of society. Life would not be possible without love. And love has a face. Let us remember that many times the Bible shows us that the Lord answers the prayer of his people: " "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. *The good Father suffers with us and listens to our prayers, especially the cry of the poor, and, as we read in the text, He does not remain silent, He does not keep quiet, He carries out His works.* "I came down to free him... So go! I send you" (Ex 3:7-8.10). How does the Lord carry out His works? He calls upon us by imbuing our hearts with His love and strength so that we may be His hands, His feet, His caress and His presence in the midst of His people.



How should we respond to those who say that this pandemic is divine retribution? It certainly depends on the God we believe in. But for those who believe in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, who gave His life to show us the path of Love, those thoughts have no meaning. It has been the view of some even in Jesus' day . When Jesus was asked: why did the tower of Siloam fall and kill all those people? He did not give an explanation, but as he did on other occasions, he exhorted us to conversion, to live that event as a sign alerting us on the urgency of our inner conversion. *Certain events that occurred in the course of history can be seen as signs that invite us to inner conversion, that is, to change our hearts. Every catastrophe or situation that creates suffering should re-awaken our compassion.* That's where wheat and darnel differ. We die when we are locked in our fears, in our self-sufficiency, in our fortresses of money and power. There is no life there, only appearance. Every event, including migrations, are signs that call us to change our hearts, otherwise, as Jesus says, "you will die in your sin" (John 8:21). **This Lent we are living through is in some ways unique.** This time of Lent, of forced spiritual retreat and service, can be a time of grace that opens our hearts. Many experiences on social networks and the internet are available to help us live this time in greater depth. Those who want to pray with Pope Francis, for example, can log on his official personal prayer profile on Click To Pray. *Finally, let us not forget the prayer offered by the Church, called "Prayer of the Present Time". It's a spiritual treasure with the psalms that guide us to pray with the words of all the men and women who have preceded us in the course of history.*

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