

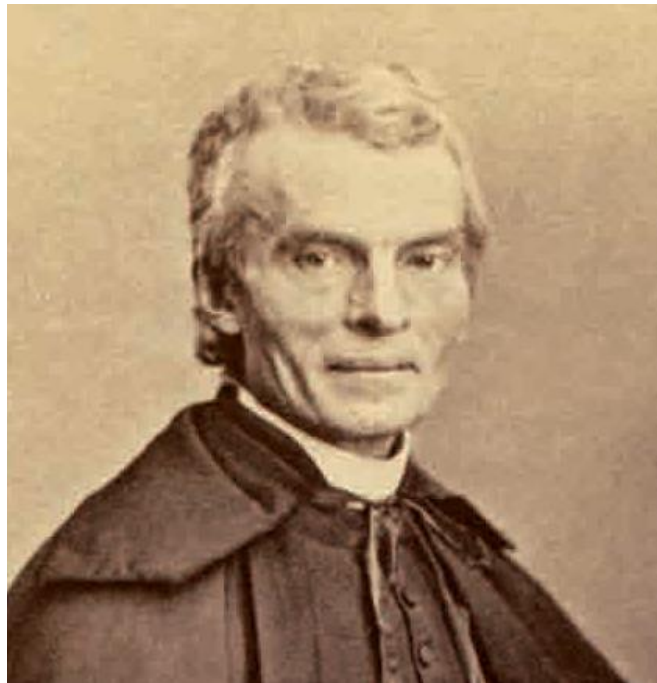


CONGREGATIO SANCTISSIMI SACRAMENTI

Superior Generalis

Message for the Eymardian Family

“But that’s what love is - an exaggeration”



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Rome - 28 April 2020

Message for the Eymardian Family

“But that’s what love is - an exaggeration”

DEAR BROTHERS,
DEAR SISTERS,

I greet you in the strength and joy of the Risen Lord!

“The Lord has truly Risen”! This is the great news that we, men and women consecrated to a Eucharistic project, are called to witness in this challenging historical moment we live at present. The *Memorial of the Lord’s Passover* is our answer and our support in the midst of all the questions humanity is called to answer. We are not alone in this journey. Even though at first He didn’t reveal himself completely to our eyes, which are not limpid enough to recognize him, our experience of faith assures us that the *Living One* walks with us and helps us to interpret, through the light of the Word, historical events, to build up the salvific and creative action of the Father.

This pandemic has hit us while we are endeavouring to follow the orientation of the 35th General Chapter. This is a great gift from the Lord who has encouraged us to take over again, at a personal, communitarian and congregational level, the central experience of Father Eymard’s life. The total offering of his life to the Lord, concretized through the profession of the vow of his personality, making a total gift of self, is our concrete way of witnessing today our consecration.

“But that’s what love is - an exaggeration. To exaggerate is to go beyond the law. Well! Love must exaggerate.” (31st October 1867, PR 124)

Relating to this synthesis made by Fr Eymard of his experience in offering his own life, we think it could be an excellent way of sharing our reflections and experiences, as a General Council, with each one of you and with each community. To be exaggerated in love could be our daily exercise to grow in faith and hope in order that we may indeed be better in the possible future that we trust will be coming soon.

As a General Council we want to present some elements for sharing and reflection springing from our different initial experiences, intellectual and spiritual formation and the cultural values that identify us. We have been enriched with contents and valuable reflections coming from different sources. Pope Francis never tires in provoking us by incisive insights, calling us to be aware of the present moment and having the strength of faith to face it. Various pastors from our particular churches have offered us their profound reflections. Some Provincials from our Congregation have provided us with their inner reflections by sharing their spiritual experiences, set within the context of the situation around them. Writers and scientists from very different fields update and help us to be open intellectually and existentially about a deeper analysis of a fast changing world, showing us alternatives. Words, indeed, are not lacking at present. Our wish is to add our voice to the choir of those who believe in life’s vigour, and following the guidelines of our *Rule of Life*, to share our way of understanding the whole of human reality through the light of the Eucharist.

This is a contribution that will need to be enriched with your experience and knowledge. We want our reflection to be as concrete as possible and, for this reason, it shall start from the constitutive elements of our mental and organizational scheme as Blessed Sacrament religious: Eucharistic Spirituality that is concretized in the building up of Fraternal Communities, of Prayer and Service, and also as regards Formation, the Economy of Communion, Administration and our walking together with lay associates. We desire, and hence request you to share your personal reflection with the community. It is in the community that the real life of the Congregation becomes incarnated and manifested. May these reflections, put together as a Province, with the knowledge, challenging insights and input of the community, guide us in our Eucharistic Journey, shared with the whole of humanity.

So, we ask you to accept, to be part of this small Eucharistic task force in sharing the word, experiences and dreams! Maybe then we will be able to give a name to the fears and uncertainties that swirl about the deepest and most intimate recesses within us, which are often silenced out of fear to express them out loud. May we, if we allow the Spirit to manifest himself, also to be strengthened through emerging truly better as a result of this existential shock caused by this tiny organism.

FRATERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNITY!

In the majority of countries where we are present we have been invited, and in some cases forced, to stay at home. Because we understand our idea of vocation as men consecrated to the Eucharist we could say, in principle, that this health control is a negation of the meaning of Community building. In a Congregation of Apostolic Life the community doesn't exist for itself, but for mission. We are gathered in the name of the Lord, as a Church, to witness and serve based on the Sacrament of Love. To be limited to the physical environment of our homes can never communicate a life choice marked by the Eucharistic dynamism, memorial of the Lord's Passover. A place of passage!



The tiny virus, invisible to the naked eye, imposes limitations to the expression of our mission. Every community, sanctuary, parish, association or any other activity in which we are organized to express our mission is subjected to limitations and restrictions in view of the health risk of each country or region. Through this the Spirit challenges us to be creative. New ways of expressing our mission are born. Let us remember, then, some of them which are already part of the Eucharistic universe we profess as a lifestyle choice. Do the circumstances imposed on us at this moment help us to live this in a more integral and truthful manner?

Fraternal Community

There are numerous communities who have justified themselves for not taking on the commitment of having community meetings. One of the reasons given is time: instead of using it for meetings it could be used for mission. Time seen as a constructed schedule has now been transformed in generosity, gratuity, expansiveness, possibility, rest. As a result of a personal and communitarian decision to overcome this world tension, being transformed at the end, we may take possession again of this valuable instrument that nourishes our consecrated identity, namely the community meetings. If not, in the future, we may go back to normal! It is clear now that this "normal" has become a

problem. We need this space and time to share our faith experience, our feelings, our knowledge, fears and uncertainties. We know well about the family relationships that are being broken due to this imposition of being together at home. Violence against women has doubled in some countries. Some situations, covered up until now by the mad rhythm of fighting for survival, manifest themselves. In our case this situation may become the opportunity to carefully verify if there is a true identification with the Blessed Sacrament Eucharistic vocation. Not all of the candidates have the vocation to live in community. This is an essential element of the Eucharistic vocational discernment. May we renew our option and exercise it in our specific way of being together, discovering that without this experience, without giving enough time for this communal encounter, we will never be realised at a vocational level.

Community of Prayer

Prayer before of the Eucharist is one of the expressions of our mission (RL 29). Different communities have organized themselves to live it in a creative, ecclesial and fruitful way. Some Blessed Sacrament religious have not yet begun, or have neglected, this particular way of praying. The fact of having understood “making adoration” as a part of our “carrying out pastoral work”, at a moment in which pastoral activity is suspended, may create a sense of emptiness. Not having to direct, prepare or preach a “Holy Hour”, some of us may feel freed from this service. We are facing a concrete opportunity for many to discover that prayer before the Eucharist is a dimension of our mission. If a direct mission with the lay faithful has been reduced, the personal and communal practice of adoration can be recovered by many of us. When this time of uncertainty is over we will be better if we recognize that our past was full of deficiencies, neglect and incoherence.

Community of Service

Many of the people who collaborate with our communities - workers, professionals or volunteers, those who help us to keep our level of life, to fulfil our needs and requirements, comfort and wellbeing - are not able to work at present. In the majority of cultures domestic services are classified as “second class”. They have to be done by people who are less qualified. The present moment may be the opportunity the Lord gives us to understand what it means, in daily life, to wash feet, namely, to live a Eucharistic spirituality incarnated in the service of our brothers. It is clear that at this moment new ways of working are being developed. Many services are offered following the ***Smart Working*** model and this tendency will continue in the future. One of the practical consequences of this is the decrease of the circulation of people which may eventually requalify and diversify the way of working, reducing the stress of overproduction and helping the environment. However various services will continue to need physical presence. The body continues to be necessary as an instrument of service. This brings about a rediscovery in many of us that domestic services can be an expression of love, a gift, sensitivity. The body offered to these services can be for us a Eucharistic body. This work should not be done with the sole scope of attending our needs of individual hygiene but as a way to build up a healthy environment amongst the brethren. We will become better people if we realize the intuitions that the Lord has given us through what he is telling us in this historical moment.

With these three simple examples we indicate the possibility of growth and of bringing real changes that may give our communities a better quality of life and witness. We invite everyone in the community to see, in their own context, that the Spirit can, if we allow him, make new everything. We can make of community life a situation of fraternal, prayerful life of service. Thus Eucharistic Spirituality can be truly understood and carried out.

I invite you now to make an imaginary continental journey, accompanied by the sharing of experiences of other members of the General Council. Beyond representing a continental geography the following texts reflect the areas of action and the personal sensitivity of each Consultor.

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FR JOSEPH VU QUOC BINH, General Consultor, re-elected during the 35th General Chapter, works efficiently as General Secretary. As a Vietnamese, Fr Binh comes from a country that has become a point of reference in the control of this pandemic, with a very low number of infected people and, as for today, no official record of deaths by Covid-19. He lives in Rome and with his Vietnamese outlook he shares with us his rich reflection about the General Administration of the Congregation.



Coronavirus – experience, adaptation, way forward

EXPERIENCE

Almost three months ago, when the new coronavirus started to spread, the majority of people in the world did not seem to take it seriously and considered it to be an internal Chinese problem. While many countries considered it as more or less a “flu” and underestimated its impact, some countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Vietnam took serious action to combat its spread.

As a Vietnamese, allow me to share my experience of living in two places – Vietnam and Italy when the coronavirus outbreak started. From the last week of December 2019 to 7 February 2020, while living in VN, I had to follow all the hygienic guidelines, wearing facemask, social distancing, limited travel and other policies from the government. The religious activities were still functioning with great precaution according to the practical instructions from the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of VN¹. Some people in risky zones were using facemasks during religious activities.

The following are some of the significant reasons why VN responded to this outbreak early, proactively and effectively:

Firstly, The Vietnamese government was well aware of the risk because of Vietnam’s land border (1.435 km) with China. Another reason is that as a developing country, VN was conscious of the limitations of its health system² and was unable to carry out the covid-19 test for all, so it had to act quickly. Since the first case was found on 23 January 2020, Vietnam has taken a number of measures to detect new infections and contain them³. Those confirmed of having the Covid-19⁴ virus were quarantined in hospitals, while suspected cases were placed in concentrated isolated zones or isolated at home. The government then set about tracking down anyone these people might have come into contact with. While other democratic and republic regimes would not be able to take these measures

¹ Letters of Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Vietnam, 2 & 5 February 2020.

² Viet Nam has around 8 doctors to every 10,000 people. Italy and Spain both have 41 doctors per 10,000 people; the US has 26, and China 18.

³ From 1 February 2020, all flights to and from China were suspended, all schools closed, letting people work and study from home, closing its borders, stopping visa issuance, closing down non-essential businesses ...

⁴ Those deemed Covid-19 suspects are people who came into close contact with patients or returned from outbreak areas, and have symptoms like cough, fever and shortness of breath.

easily because of infringement of human rights, privacy and freedom, VN, being a communist one-party regime, was able to do so quickly.

Secondly, the Vietnamese people were aware of the serious danger of covid-19: From their experience of the “brotherhood relationship” between VN and China, most Vietnamese did not trust the information provided by the Chinese government relating to this pandemic, doubted the data of the Vietnamese government, and even doubted the announcements of WHO, which at that time were criticized as too late and too dependent on Chinese data. Moreover, there is very rich information from Vietnamese and Chinese workers who work in China and vice versa (there are about 100,000 Vietnamese workers in China and 30,000 Chinese workers in VN). People had a mentality of self-help, trying as possibly as they could to protect themselves.

Thirdly, society, culture and lifestyle may also contribute positively to this battle. Few people use public transport, which is still limited and insufficient, while the majority use motorbikes. It can be seen as a type of “social distancing”. Another factor was that when the first wave of coronavirus outbreak happened in China, most Vietnamese were preparing to celebrate Tet festival, Lunar New-year. During this time, people normally stay at home with their families and limit travel. Another factor is that in Vietnamese culture, people do not usually show affection in public (like kissing and hugging). In addition, wearing facemasks is considered normal in VN as a means to protect people from motorbike emission and pollution. Along with these measures, there are also the creatively social distancing campaign and the promotion of public hygiene.

As a result of these social-cultural elements, the awareness of limited clinical resources and the early response by the government, Viet Nam seems to have managed to get the outbreak under control. Up to now, it has 268 cases (223 cured), 2 serious cases, and no recorded deaths.

ADAPTATION IN GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

When I left for Rome on 7 February 2020, VN had only 13 cases of covid-19, but Tan-San-Nhat Airport was almost empty. Arriving in Fiumicino Airport, I was surprised to see that so many people were neglecting all precautionary measures. Wearing facemasks felt strange and odd-looking to other people. I had to learn to adjust myself to another culture and society in my international community in the Curia, especially to adapt myself to the Secretariat and general administration as general secretary and consultant. First thing I had to do was to recognise myself as a potential covid-19 patient as a result of travelling, especially since I had a sore throat and mild cold. So I had to keep social distance from the community and my colleague in the secretariat. At the same time, I was seeking a way to carry out our ministries effectively, while guaranteeing a healthy environment. As a result, Mrs. Valérie, secretary, had to work from home.

Exactly a month after returning to Rome, on 8 March 2020, the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers of Italy was published, which suspended non-essential production and working activity, and in the following three days the whole of Italy was put in lockdown to cut the spread of covid-19. In the light of this Decree, the *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* had to adjust its activities and guarantee their continuation in this difficult time, by means of two significant communications. The first communication on March 26, 2020 was to reduce its activities only to urgent practices, such as: requests for legal representation, postponement of chapters, urgent dispensation and alienations, which can be done simply via the internet (email) in pdf format. The second, on April 2, 2020, authorized the postponement of General and Provincial Chapters, thus extending the mandates of the major superiors and respective councils until the next chapters.

The coronavirus outbreak, undoubtedly, affects directly the activities of our Congregation. We were preparing for the meeting of the Amplified General Council, foreseen to be held from 5-22 May

2020 in Rome, but the pandemic has resulted in its holdover for an indefinite period⁵. Despite its postponement, the activities of the general administration have continued to deal with its consequences⁶, as does the general secretariat. From February up to now, the General Council has organized at least three meetings, one normal physical meeting (17-21 February) and two other videoconference meetings⁷ (9 March and 15 April). We are systematically learning how to manage and exercise as well as possible the mission that the Congregation has entrusted to us.

THE WAY FORWARD

Undoubtedly, this pandemic has affected all people! It is creating chaos in society, panic for people, and especially inexpressible suffering for its victims and their families. However, this strange period also gives us an opportunity to reflect on our spiritual life, and evaluate the real values in life. It is also a lesson for humankind, who was so proud of its scientific and medical achievements, but is now overwhelmed by a small virus. It also provides a multifaceted vision of social organization. Sometimes, present unfavorable factors can become positive values in another time and vice versa.

While some countries are discussing prudent approaches to be able to live with covid-19, we, as the general administration, especially the secretariat, are reflecting on how to adapt ourselves in this new phase. This pandemic does not prevent us from working, and its impact may actually reinforce the way we used to exercise our collaboration – via internet and email!

Even though the battle with this pandemic is continuing, we never fail to acknowledge that the Risen Lord is still accompanying us, as he did with the two Emmaus disciples. He will protect us and show us the right way, as well as giving us the strength to overcome it.

Fr Joseph Vu Quoc Binh, sss

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⁵ Cfr. the letter of Fr. General to all members of the AGC, and the letter to all religious on March 10, 2020.

⁶ Cancellation of air tickets of AGC members, Visa procedure, companies involved in organizing the AGC, ...

⁷ Fr. Benzy Philip, General Treasurer and consultor, has been in India from late February because of the situation of his mother and was then unable to return because of the country total lockdown on 25 March. Fr. Jose Antonio Rivera Ruiz, General consultor, lives in Spain and for the same reason is unable to come to Rome for meeting.

FR JOSÉ ANTONIO RIVERA RUIZ, elected as a General Consultor during the 35th General Chapter, has taken over the position of Vicar General shortly after the nomination of Mons. Martin Tine as Bishop of Kaolack, Senegal, in 2018. Insofar as the General Chapter modified number 74.01/2 of the General Statutes, allowing some consultors to live outside the General House, he has continued to live in Madrid, travelling to Rome for the meetings that require his presence. Following is his report, showing us a European perspective and representing those who live in one of the main sites affected by the coronavirus outbreak.



To the Eymardian Family

First of all I want to present my heartfelt greetings and the most sincere wishes of hope to all of you who are part of Fr Eymard's great family, hoping you are well.

I would like to share some words of encouragement and comfort during this Paschal season from Madrid, a city of the world, where I live; a place that has sadly become famous for the high number of dead people caused by Covid-19, among them one of our brethren, Fr José Miguel Larrañaga. Those days were very difficult for me and made me reflect about the end of life and how vulnerable we are.

I have been receiving constant news from abroad, from my Province and other Provinces of which I am responsible for accompanying, about the consequences of this very deadly virus. This news, coming from near and far, from Europe, South America and other latitudes, contains reports about daily life filled with uncertainty, resignation, solitude, sadness, suffering but also about peace and hope. I followed with much concern the news arriving from Ponteranica, a community that has suffered directly the consequences of the virus. What they lived must've been terrible. I am following with attention the news from Brazil, with some of our religious students being infected and the recent death of Mons. Aldo di Cillo Pagotto.

I also think of the other branch of our family that I have the responsibility for accompanying, the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, its members and families. I think of the aggregates whom I personally know in Brazil, France, Italy and the ones from other countries, of the following national meetings programmed in Vietnam and India. I wonder, how they are living this time of the Pandemic?

Regarding this long confinement, which in Spain started on 15 March, I think of how fortunate I am to live in a community with so much space and the possibility of sharing my restlessness with the brethren. It is true that, even though all of the time we have spent in lockdown, we haven't been able to reach a different level of communication apart from a formal one. There are many reasons for this: age difference, personality, language ... The communication that relates to an ideal of sharing: what we do, what worries us, our fears, desires, our projects, frustrations, our results ... namely, to "share everything in common", from the simplest to the most profound, to pass from "being part of the community", to "feel ourselves as a Community", looking towards the common good.

I have meditated about the great Gift that we have, to be able to celebrate the Eucharist and get nourished from it daily and I then think of the members of the aggregation and what the media tells us, how they are also confined and probably with much less space, people who have lost their loved ones and are going through this suffering with the sadness of lacking the Eucharist Bread and Wine. How can we give them comfort?

In Europe, during the critical moments of uncertainty, added to the intensity and the devastating effects of the virus, governments and other institutional organs have questioned the principles of foundational values, such as solidarity. A difference between Northern Europe and Southern Europe

was revealed, with personal and political interests that move beyond the common good. The latest news seems to be of a behaviour more in line with these principles. I think of the people and families who will be hit by the lack of earnings and in some cases unemployment. What consequences can we foresee for the future?

Today the famous saying is very fitting: “when we have found the answers the questions have already changed”. Suddenly all of our certainties have been destroyed and we have had to radically change our lifestyle. In front of this desolating panorama there are many foreseeable consequences and also many questions arising. I will try to give an answer coming from my life, my vocation and my responsibility:

- What kind of elements or circumstances among those lived in this period may be useful to foster a deeper experience of our Eucharistic Spirituality?
- What kind of elements or circumstances among those lived in this period may be useful to reinforce the quality of our communitarian lifestyle?
- What kind of elements or circumstances among those lived in this period may be useful to draw up a proposal of community life more in line with the current times?
- What kind of resources will we be able to draw on to help people and families in need?
- How can we strengthen the necessary resources and values of sharing and solidarity?
- How can we offer supportive words and hope to the people who have suffered so greatly?

We are witnessing many demonstrations of solidarity and closeness despite the social distancing and the risks involved. People who were considered strangers because they were outside our environment now show interest for one another, people get out on balconies to encourage each other and health workers who look after our wellbeing. Every day, like a ritual, one goes onto the balcony and greets each other or takes food to those in need. The same happens with the messages received, so many coming each day that we find it difficult to respond to everyone. What does all this teach us?

Many prophetic voices are emerging now, among these Pope Francis’ voice is very relevant, having encouraged us through the whole of Lent and afterwards during the Easter time, based on the Word of God, not to ever lose faith and to regain our trust in God, our Father.

If we allow ourselves to be totally conquered by the presence of the Risen one, and in an explicit way by the Gift of the Eucharist, heroic and transformative answers will spontaneously spring up.

Fr José Antonio Rivera Ruiz, sss

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FR AGOSTINHO CASTIGO MAHOLELE, from Mozambique, elected to complete the General Council after Mons. Martin Tine's departure, at present he is in Rome, but with an outlook directed to the African reality, with his sensitivity accompanying also the very demanding area of Formation,. He offers us his contribution characterized by his intellectual and existential specializations. With words, the psychologist Fr Agostinho expresses feelings and throws light on how to keep our dreams alive.



Life in the context of the Coronavirus Pandemic

How do I experience the time of confinement due to the coronavirus pandemic in the General Curia, and in Italy? It is certainly an atypical experience. In my former life I grew up in an environment of civil war in my country, I have had to live many times in situations of death, it was necessary to escape and spend nights in the woods so then, in the morning, go back to see the effects of the battle, the death and destruction of buildings. Yet living with those situations was never as stressing as it is with this experience.

In January I had pity and some emphatic fear towards the common human fragility among the Chinese. But this concerned China and Asia! It was enough to avoid contact with people coming from those parts and everything was going to be alright. The majority of people thought in the same way as I did.

Things were altered drastically when the drama began in Lombardy. Here everything changed because of the speed in which the contagion evolved. The sensation of real risk was imminent. The image we had of China, with its death and all its drama was now here, in daily life. Every certainty fell apart. The brother one lives with, the environment one lives in, the objects one cannot avoid like door handles, phones, buses, chairs at table, in a word, everything had become a potential risk of contagion.

This new reality took the ground away from under my feet. An involuntary anxiety overtook my life. Some comments I had been hearing came back to me to disturb my sleeping. Many times I woke up with the sensation of having the symptoms of Covid-19: dryness in the throat, lack of breath and others, fortunately they were only false alarms. When daylight arrived everything was normal.

As many of us experienced there was lots of contradictory information, competing constantly with misinformation. Many were saying, minimizing the risk, that it was just like influenza and that many people every year died of it. Others said it just hit the elderly who suffered from other diseases. News coming now from the north of Italy, the country where I live, have been shown to be erroneous regarding all these theories. The pandemic affects us all, including health workers. Since migration inside the country is very frequent here the spread of the virus was very rapid.

The backbone of the country has been hit. The State responded playing all its cards trying to prevent the spread. Confinements in local areas began, then becoming a national policy. The symbolism of a possible death acquired a greater configuration in the mind of many people, including mine. In my community one could see that the ones who were at first optimistic now were afraid! The atmosphere in the community has lost its habitual light heartedness. It has been very helpful to share among ourselves how each one experiences the present situation.

The passing of days has brought the shock of knowing the progressive increase of positive cases of Covid-19 in the African continent where, according to the WHO, the diagnosis of infected cases is inferior to the real situation. In a moment in which some countries are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel, Africa is just living an anticipation of great suffering. In effect many specialists share the idea that this continent is considered the most vulnerable in front of the devastation that the

virus can bring. Vulnerability is due, first of all, to the weakness of the health systems, together with the fragility of other systems - economic, political and social – in the majority of the countries of the area. This situation is disconcerting for me and for the other African people who either live there or abroad.

Viktor Frankl, from his experience at the concentration camps, had the intuition that there was no circumstance that could take away the essential freedom of a human person. It is to me, hence, to decide subjectively what to do in this historical moment. I have decided to choose inner peace, to include in my prayers all that I have lived and ask for inner peace. I am infinitely grateful to the divine solicitude which has nourished my deepest need. Risk is not over but anxiety is gone. I am serene.

The disease has spread throughout the world, hitting different countries where we are present with our SSS communities. After the confreres were affected in Italy, there was always the need to communicate this experience and to persuade them to follow the measures of prevention, fearing that other confreres may become victims. My thoughts are always with the formation houses, which I remember during celebrations. Many of them are big communities in which the confinement measures are not going to be easy to manage. Only God knows!

“A quelque chose malheur est bon!” (disgraces have a positive side), the French say. The Coronavirus has brought a blessing in many dimensions of human life. I am aware that the need for social distancing, the avoidance of doing so many things that imply physical contact, have increase the appreciation of each other. I feel that the relationships in the community have acquired a sense of value beyond that which we had before the Coronavirus. Qualitatively there are more moments of community prayer and other activities we live together.

When I came to know about the lockdown in the countries where we have formation houses I was concerned for our brethren’s studies. Consolation arrived when I realized that formation is not only academic. Soon I became aware that this may be an opportunity to re-discover other formative dimensions, realize and develop talents, even if in a self-taught manner.

My hope is that after the Coronavirus there will be a relaunch of human values in our SSS communities, in the Church and in the world in general.

Fr Agostinho Castigo Maholele, sss

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FR PHILLIP BENZY ROMICIAN, Consultor and General Treasurer, is coordinating the difficult task received by the General Chapter to re-think the financial administration of the Congregation. With his Asian-Indian outlook and his professional capacities in administrative areas, in a clear and objective way, he helps us to reflect about the huge questions that the world is living at an economical level. He invites us to make our contribution regarding the search for solutions based on the Eucharistic life we have chosen, underlining the challenge of witnessing to the vow of poverty.



My reflection on Covid-19 and present situation

THE QUESTIONS

When will I be back to normal life again? Where will I be in six months from now? What does the future hold for me and for my loved ones? these are the questions that everyone in the world is asking right now. Not only the 1/3 of the population of the world who are under lockdown currently, even others too are asking these questions. Because everyone in the world is directly or indirectly affected by this present pandemic caused by Covid-19.

FROM INDIAN PERSPECTIVE – PROBLEMS -RESPONSES

As I got stuck in India from the last week of February 2020, my reflection will be from an Indian perspective who is experiencing this epidemic in India. The print, electronic and social media have created the awareness of the Coronavirus, its rapid contagious characteristics and the destruction it causes on human lives and other spheres of life, well ahead of the first case of Coronavirus registered in India on 30th of January 2020. The tests were conducted throughout the nation but there was no seriousness among the people. Finally, the government responded with complete lockdown from 25th of March 2020 with 4 hours of notice. It caused lot of practical problems, ‘law and order’ problems in few places and panics. Managing 1.3 billion people in this extraordinary situation is a monumental task.

It has affected the personal, social, emotional, financial and spiritual life of every individual. Around 450 million people are daily wage workers in India and most of them are migrants from villages. They are the worst affected people. But many organizations, common people and the church were very quick and positive in responding to the situation by providing food and shelters. Until now the spirit of the citizens is positive and the energy level is high. It may be because, relatively India is in control of the situation. We do not know how the future would be.

GLOBAL ECONOMY: FEARS AND HOPE

There will be lot of personal, psychological, social, financial, spiritual and emotional problems in the days to come. The post epidemic program is very important for everyone to get out of this situation with ease and without any further problems. I would like to share in brief about the impact of the epidemic on economy and what do the financial experts suggest on this.

The lockdown has placed a lot of pressure on global economy. The world is facing a serious recession. The epidemic and the lockdown has affected every sector of production, trade, entertainment, travelling, tourism, education and so on, in the world. The real impact of the lockdown on the economy can be seen only after 3 months. This has placed a lot of pressure on the governments of the nations to ease-down the lockdown so that people may continue to work and the economy can be saved from collapsing. In other-words the leaders of the countries are left with two fundamental options, i) to give priority to the protection of life or ii) to give priority to stabilize the economy.

At the beginning of this year UN has predicted that the world economy may boost up to 2.5% but now seeing the lockdowns and the pandemic the UN has predicted that the world economy may shrink to 1% which means that the economy growth will be negative to 1% for this year⁸. All the direct and indirect income of our communities and provinces will also face this effect. It will bring a financial constrain on our formation, mission and healthcare.

To overcome this financial situation of today, the ecological-economists suggest that the world has to move towards to produce only what is essential to live and people must consume only what they need to live. In Christian terminology we call this as spirituality of minimalism, living with what is essential and necessary. It is also the time for us to practice 'Economy of Communion' consciously in our communities, provinces and in our congregation at large. Economy of communion is the principle which calls us to share our resources in solidarity.

Darkness and death do not have the last word⁹. The resurrection will always triumph. The spirituality of minimalism and economy of communion will help us overcome our fear with hope.

Fr Philip Benzy Romician, sss

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⁸ https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/global-economy-could-shrink-by-almost-1-in-2020-due-to-covid-19-pandemic-united-nations/articleshow/74943235.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

⁹ <https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/106042/pope-francis-darkness-and-death-do-not-have-the-last-word/>

CONCLUSION

As previously indicated this message has the objective of sharing with you our experience in facing this difficult moment the whole of humanity is going through. We hope this will initiate a dialogue that will extend, starting from your reactions and the sharing of your own community and missionary realities. A Eucharistic Spirituality look towards, in a special way, the sharing of life. We can continue to express and transform this endeavour in a habitual practice in our communities. We want to get through this moment with the uttermost historical awareness and responsibility so that we can emerge from it becoming more mature, strengthened in our faith and enriched in solidarity.

May Jesus' mother, the Eucharistic woman, accompany and bless us in our daily struggles. May Saint Peter Julian Eymard, our Father Founder, lovingly intercede for the Family he has generated inside the Church. Our Venerable brothers, Fr Lodovico Longari and Br Giovanni Nadiani, are also our travel companions. We have a vast spiritual community that makes us feel strengthened in faith and in the hope of being able to get through this great battle. May we desire and make an effort to be always better Eucharistic women and men.

Fraternally.

On behalf of the General Council

Fr. Eugênio Barbosa Martins

FR EUGÊNIO BARBOSA MARTINS, SSS
Superior General

