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LETTER FROM THE MASTER OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER, COVID-19: some members of the Dominican family in the north of the Italy have contracted the virus

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NESSUN COMMENTO

16 MARZO 2020

<https://www.op.org/articles/news-2020/letter-from-the-master-of-the-order-covid-19/>
(<https://www.op.org/articles/news-2020/letter-from-the-master-of-the-order-covid-19/>).

Rome, 15 March 2020

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom should I be
afraid? For God will hide me in his shelter in time of trouble,
He will conceal me in the cover of his tent.*

PSALM 27:1,5

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Dominican Family,

As you know, after China, Italy is suffering gravely due to covid-19. Some members of the Dominican family in the north of the country have contracted the virus. Let us continue to pray for all the sick, those who care for them, those who are trying their best to find ways in overcoming the pandemic and its adverse effects.

Together with the brothers and sisters here at Santa Sabina, I wish to offer words of solidarity as a gesture of our nearness to one another at this time when common good requires “social distancing”. Our mission is to build *communion* and yet in this time of crisis, we seem to surrender ourselves to *isolation*. Paradoxical as it may seem, keeping distance from one another means we truly care for each other, because we want to stop the transmission of the novel corona virus that has claimed the lives of many and has imperiled the lives and livelihood of countless people all over the world. We keep our distance not because we see our brother or sister as a potential virus-carrier, or we are afraid of getting sick; but because we want *to help break the chain of viral transmission*. When the healthcare system becomes overloaded, as it happened in the north of Italy, our health care providers will be forced to make difficult ethical decisions — would a patient who is younger and therefore with longer life-expectancy be prioritized over one who is elderly? We hope and pray that we would prevent that from happening anywhere by doing whatever we can to prevent further toxic transmission. Here in Italy, as in other countries, it is painful for us not to publicly celebrate the Eucharist, the *sacrament of communion*, at a time when the people need it most because of *isolation*. And yet we have to endure this suffering in the spirit of human solidarity and communion, for “if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it” (I Cor. 12:26).

In this time of *quarantena en quaresima*, we are invited to pause and ponder the nearness of God to us. When public worship is suspended for the well-being of worshippers, we become keenly aware of the importance of *spiritual communion*. In these places, it is as though the people experience a prolonged “Holy Saturday” when the Church “abstains from the celebration of the Eucharist” meditating on the passion of the Lord and awaiting his resurrection (*Paschale Solemnitatis*, 73-75). In an experiential way, we are reminded of the hunger for the Eucharist of our brothers and sisters in remote areas who could participate in the Mass only once or twice a year. Now, more than ever, we need to find ways on how to break isolation, to preach the Gospel of love and communion, even in the “digital continent” (ACG Biên Hòa 2019, 135-138). We need to remind our people that Jesus remains near to us even as we hunger for the Bread of Life.

Let me recall what we know deep within our hearts. If we want to spread the Gospel, we must be with the people, be near to them! We must cross linguistic, cultural, even ideological boundaries to spread the Word of God. Conversely, if we want to arrest the spread of something bad like the corona virus, we must keep distance, we must refrain from personal encounter because any proximate encounter has the potential to spread the contagion.

The current pandemic clearly shows that for something to circulate, personal closeness and encounter is necessary. When this crisis is over, let us not forget the lesson: if we want the Gospel to circulate in our secularized world, the same personal closeness and encounter is necessary. I hope and pray that our centers of studies, parishes, and other apostolic centers would continue to become like an “airport”, i.e., a hub where people deepen their knowledge and faith so that they too may positively “infect” everyone with the contaminating joy of the Gospel.

We continue to pray for the sick and those who care for them. Even in our solitude, God is close to us, and we are never alone for we all belong to the Body of Christ.

Your brother,

Fr. Gerard Francisco P. Timoner III, OP

Master of the Order

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