

Marist Formation and COVID-19

It has been a very strange Lent this year. Just as we received the ashes on 26th February parts of northern Italy near Milan were locked down. We had heard about what had been happening in Wuhan in China earlier in the year but that seemed a long way away from us. The further we made our way towards Holy Week the greater the number of people and nations effected by Covid-19.

More and more restrictions on our movements and on our daily lives were brought in as the numbers of those affected grew and grew. Suddenly schools, universities, workplaces and churches were closed and people had to stay at home. Travel is very restricted and millions of people have lost their jobs. The numbers of sick and dead continue to increase in many places. What will the future hold?



Fernando and the novitiate community in Davao sent a short newsletter to the other formation houses about how their community had been impacted by Covid-19. It seemed a good idea to let others know how the formation houses of the Society around the world are living in these days.

Thank you to the different people in formation who contributed the articles from around the world. Thank you to the Casa di Maria community for working to ensure the newsletter could go around the Society in French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and English.

The women who went to the tomb early on that Sunday morning so long ago did not go there joyfully. They went there to fulfil the ritual and cultural requirements for burial. They were surprised, even shocked, at what they found – or rather what they did not see. They went back and told the others what had happened and so the story of Jesus continued to spread.

We should always remember those events of Easter. What seemed like death, what seemed like the end – was in fact, just the beginning.

How will our lives and our way of life and our Society be shaped by the events of Lent 2020?

Tony Kennedy sm



Buona Pasqua

Happy Easter

Isangli Ista

Joyeuses Pâques

Feliz Páscoa

feliz Pascua

toetu'u fiefia

Siganimate marautaki

Hamamas bilong Ista





COVID-19 UPDATE

Thanks to the location of the novitiate center, one can say that the novitiate community is slightly safe; being miles away from Manila where most cases in the Philippines are found and situated in the mountains, about an hours drive from Davao city. But the fear, concerns and worries certainly cannot be avoided and like many, we all wonder how long is covid -19's visit going to last. Slowly it's been creeping down the South of Philippines and to date, there are 3 confirmed cases in the Davao region.

Thanks to the quick reactions of relevant authorities that the situation is under control; at least for now. Precautionary measures have



been taken and one can only pray and hope that a solution is found before the virus shows its might in this densely populated country of over a 100 million people. (picture: courtesy of UNTV news)



Effects on Novitiate Program

Adhering to municipal authorities, pastoral works have to be put on hold for everyone's safety. Shopping has changed from weekly to fortnightly and the formation team has been risking themselves killing two birds with one stone, buying essential items whenever they go out for something other than shopping.



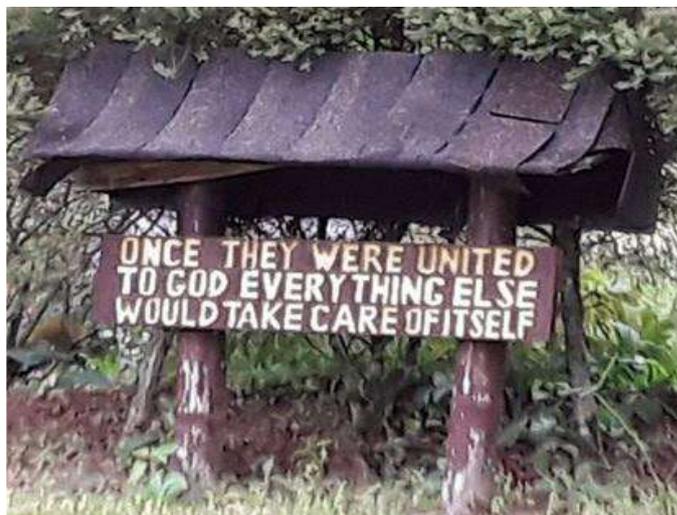
Plans to have Fr Juan Carlos SM from the General House for Holy Week have been cancelled as well. Thankfully that for now, novices are still able to see their spiritual directors but the change is that the Directors have to come up to Eden (the good of having Marists as novice directors...). For how long, still remains to be the question especially those directors in Digos who will have to cross the provincial border.

On the Good side....

The pandemic has provided more time for us to share together as a community and even an extra class where we can learn about other languages...

The flowers, the lawn grass, the vegetable farm and the playing court are happy that from now, they are expecting to be getting more visits than usual.

These are some things that should keep us occupied in this time of isolation and we continue hoping that.....



News from BRAZIL

Here at the Seminário São Pedro Chanel in Belo Horizonte we are all well and healthy, thanks be to God!

We have been in social isolation for more than ten days, as instructed by the Ministry of Health.

Fr. Renivaldo prepares our main meal, as our employee is also in the isolation standard.

So far, isolation has not yet brought serious problems. The shopping, when not made by phone, is made by

Father Renivaldo in nearby supermarkets.

Some seminarians have the ability to make bread and are putting it at the service of the community.

This whole situation has helped us to enjoy community life more. Our meals are more relaxed, without much haste.

We decided to broadcast our daily mass via Instagram, giving lay people the possibility to participate with us.

This is it for now!

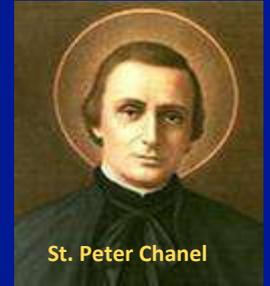
We continue in prayer that God will have mercy on us and deliver us from this evil.



The seminarians usually take classes every mornings, from Monday to Friday, via online!



St. Peter CHANEL FORMATION HOUSE



St. Peter Chanel

82 1st Avenue, Zone 7, Talomo District, Davao City, Philippines / P.O Box 80539 Davao City, Philippines 8000.

The House of Formation of the Society of Mary -

Marists in the District of Asia for Young Men Aspiring to become Marist Missionary.

Not on Vacation but to Grow in Missionary Vocation



Resty, one of the MICS, helps in hauling sacks of rice in Lebak Market.



Hands of Melbert, one of the MICS, washes the dishes while parents, a local official, are away to distribute goods to the community.



Melbert helps prepare a meal.



Photo above. Tulip Drive, a road in front of St. Peter Chanel Formation House is seemingly quiet except for this man waiting for his chance to catch a cab. This road is usually busy.

COVID-19 imposed Community Retreat

There are 40 confirmed cases of covid-19 as of 4:30 p.m. March 30, 2020 here in Davao City. The whole city is under community quarantine since 15th of March and was locked down in March 17, 2020 until present. Churches, commercial centres, schools and universities, places of entertainment, shopping malls, restaurants, cafes, except food shops, food market, fuel stations, banks and pawnshops are close until now.

The by-pass road in-front of the formation house is overwhelmingly quiet. Usually traffic starts to get busy on this road from 6:30 a.m until 8:00 p.m. The sound of a single passing vehicle is noticeable for almost two weeks now than the usual noise of the heavy traffic during vespers. The quiet and less crowded atmosphere of the city seemed to exude feeling of fear, danger and suspicion. On the other hand, it helps one to think of one's human vulnerability, mortality and finality. These facilitates consciousness for a need for divine assistance and intervention.



Photo Above. Fr. John Guo, S.M. (in white shirt) and 5 Balay Pasilungan staff (2 of them are former MICS and a Marist Lay), supervising the safety protocol on covid-19 in the street children centre.

Caring for our common 'house'

Community quarantine is difficult and has slowed down the fast phasing of our daily life and ministries, yet, we are benefiting from it.

The formation house is empty. We did some building maintenance work. Br. Denis O'Brien became available to do some maintenance work both in the District House and the Formation House, while waiting for the quarantine to be lifted and commence the construction of the district chapel.

We need to take the jobs of the house staff while they are not available to work. We do marketing, cook our own meals, clean the house, look after the garden and do our own laundry.

"Povy" has learned new tricks; birds and some rabbits are well looked after; more time for fitness and healthy eating; and more study time.

This is a difficult time but it helps us to slow down, pray more, get in touch again with our basic humanity and care more for our common home: ourselves, community, and the creation around us. #



Catholic priests or any religious leader cannot celebrate worship in public. Christians and all religions are not allowed to gather to celebrate their faith. Religious communities are privileged having priests in their midst. They can gather and celebrate liturgies as community. Our ordained confreres are not saying masses outside the community, consequently, we have more time to pray together and do house hold chores together. After each meal, we jokingly remind each other, "let's return now to our retreat."

MICS taking refuge in their families

As soon as the formation team was informed by the University of Immaculate Conception (UIC) that classes and exams will be postponed from March 16 to April 20, and the city was to be put under community quarantine, we called for a meeting to reflect on how to respond to the situation.

All of the 6 MICS (Marist Interested College Students) come from far distant provinces from Davao City. It is safer for them to be with their families during this time than to be in the city. Local transmission of covid-19 could be widespread in the city considering Davao City is the one of the biggest centres in Mindanao, Philippines.

On 15 March evening they were sent home to spend the time of quarantine with their families. 2 of the 6 MICS became Persons Under Monitoring (PUM) when they arrive in their home place because they came from Davao City. It has been two weeks now that they are with their families and are looking forward to return to the formation house.



Above left. A sample of a quarantine pass. One member of each family is given a quarantine pass to allow that member to purchase food and medicine.

Above right. Angelo, one of the MICS is enjoying a safer life with his family while preparing a meal during this time when most of the provinces and cities are locked down..



Marist College Suva

Bula to you all! Just a report to share what is happening on this side of the world regarding the coronavirus pandemic.

On March the 19th, we received news of our first coronavirus case here in Fiji. It was first announced that classes will continue as usual at the Pacific Regional Seminary, with some restrictions for students not to go out of the seminary premises. But after we received news of the second case, PRS cancelled classes and went into lockdown.



All PRS social activities, pastoral visits and PRS community masses got cancelled.

No visitors are allowed in the seminary premises and no public Masses at PRS on a Sunday.

Two of our lecturers returning from overseas were put into self-isolation.

The beginning of the week was exciting for Marist College when we received our seven pre-propaedeutic students for their orientation. As the cases of coronavirus increased to five, we had to terminate the programme on Wednesday and send them home on Friday.

Fr. Denis Revi giving orientation classes to the seven Pre-Propaedeutic students.



We are planting more vegetables and root crops as we make use of the lockdown.

Meanwhile classes for the Seminary resumed by using an online programme called Zoom.



Fr. 'Aisake Silatolu giving Philosophy classes with year 2 Marist students while connecting with other formation houses on 'Zoom.'

Sports and other initiative programmes have been cancelled, We have substituted for them by planting more in our vegetable garden and doing other beautification projects.

On Wednesday, last week, we gathered at 11pm as a community and joined the Holy Father with the rest of the world in praying for the coronavirus pandemic. We continue to pray for countries severely affected, especially those of you in Italy. May our Blessed Mother intercede for us and allow doctors and scientists to find a cure.





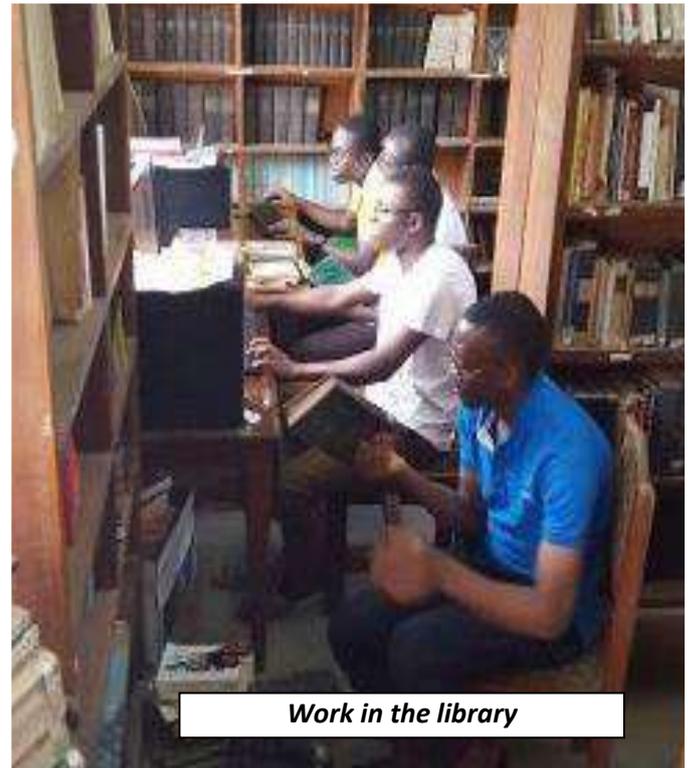
MAISON SAINT PIERRE CHANEL

Life in Maison Saint Pierre Chanel Cameroon during this moment of lockdown

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19, Cameroon is experiencing a rapid spread of the virus. At the moment, official figures from the ministry of Public Health as of today, 31st March 2020 shows that Cameroon has registered a total number of 193 cases (182 active cases, 6 deceased and 5 recovered). There are still more unidentified cases due to slow screening and reaction by the government. Yaoundé (capital) and Douala (economic capital) are the worst hit regions.

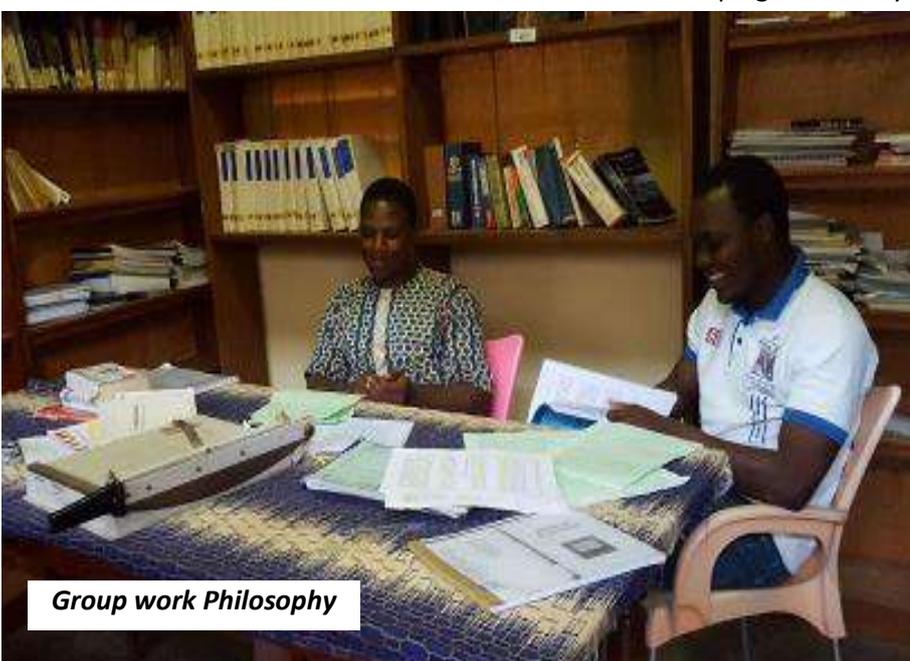
For more than two weeks now, schools are closed, religious and public gatherings suspended, bars and recreation centres close at 6pm, public transport are regulated in order to keep social distancing. The greatest danger is that people seem not to be taking it seriously. But we have to stay at home, keep safe and keep our community life busy.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, with all the schools closed, we have adjusted our community programme to keep life busy and useful in various ways. Thank God we are all well and safe. We give more time for prayer, sports and manual work.



Work in the library

The students have lots of homework to do and that is keeping them busy. Some take time to do some gardening around the compound. The novices while waiting for their next destination are having some serious fun reorganising the community library.



Group work Philosophy

For some of the students, the experience of lockdown has many advantages for them. One of them said: "I find more time to work on my assignments without any pressure, rest, and pray for the needs of the world. I am learning to do many things that I did not have to time do, like cooking on Sundays and doing some odd jobs."



Creative work

This time of isolation is bringing out lots of hidden talents, the house is more organised and cleaner, and we have more quality time together.



Painting



Vegetable nursery

I know that you are present in this Blessed Sacrament. Take this Corona virus away from us Lord. May your healing hand come to our aid. Have mercy on your people who are suffering and who have no means to feed themselves or even to cure themselves. Eradicate this invisible enemy who makes us suffer emotionally by scaring us. Come to our help Lord and have mercy on your suffering people. Heal us from this virus and make us come back to you and know that God is stronger than any human action. Nothing is above you Lord. Amen



Garden ready to be planted.

Marist Seminary, Auckland, New Zealand

New Zealand is at what is called Alert Level 4, which means we are in total lock down. Like many other countries, we are only allowed to leave our home to go to a supermarket, pharmacy, or to get some exercise.

We are continuing the seminary program with the usual routine of prayer, formation meetings, inside and outside work, and community time.



Our chapel is an important part of our daily life, and during this time of lockdown we have been lucky to be able to continue our schedule of meditation, prayer and Mass. Praying for our country and the whole world has been an important part of this.

The Theological College where the seminarians study has been providing classes online. From March 30th to April 20th the college is in recess for the Easter break. Classes will resume after then, continuing either to be online or in class if the college opens at the end of the four week lockdown.

The seminarians continue with their in-house studies which include – human formation meetings, Marist studies, public speaking and music classes.

They are also continuing with assignments, and their own reading and study.



There is usually a cook at the seminary who prepares the evening meal from Monday to Friday. She is no longer able to travel to work, so community members are taking turns to cook.

We are blessed with several very good cooks and the variety of food prepared has uplifted the community spirits.

Fr. Chris is our diligent 'shopper' and provides all that we need. Sometimes it can take quite a while, depending on the queues.

We are also preparing to provide some online liturgies over the Easter season on the local diocesan website. We will also prepare reflections for the seminary Facebook page, during the novena for vocations leading up to the feast of St Peter Chanel.



In talking about our experience so far, we are aware of how lucky we are here compared to so many other parts of the world. This time has allowed us to become more sensitive to each other, to deepen friendships, but also to allow each other to have their own space.

We send our Easter greetings to everyone in the Society and assure them of our prayers.

Pat Breeze SM and the Marist Seminary community.



Nik Rodewald

The last few weeks, as the COVID-19 has swept over the world have been turbulent, to say the least. Yet, where there is turbulence, there is also grace. Here in Washington, DC, the Catholic University of America – where I am completing my Master of Music degree – went on spring recess on March 7.

I drove up to Poughkeepsie, New York, to visit with our confreres, John Ulrich SM and Kevin Duggan SM, and to participate in a vocation awareness event with the students to whom they minister at Marist College. It was a grace to share in the stories of some of these students who remain faithful to seeking God's call, even when they do not have the support of their parents, friends, or culture.

After my time there, I was due to visit with my family for a few days in Tennessee. At that point, the situation in the U.S. worsened and the university chose to move classes online. I was able to spend a few extra days with my family before returning to the Washington, DC, area. Still, because I had been engaging in quite a bit of travel as the pandemic worsened, and given the vulnerability of some of our confreres in Washington, it was agreed that I would self-quarantine for the standard 14-day period with a couple of friends just outside Washington.

Separation from the community has been difficult, as has seeing the anxiety that so many carry in the midst of the pandemic and the economic crisis that accompanies it. I felt that, as an artist, one way to respond to this would be by releasing new works of art. So, I made a commitment to release new music, poetry, and fiction every three days during this pandemic, and have begun an online campaign trying to enlist other artists to do the same.

In times when many are unable to receive the sacraments, the grace of God finds other ways to be manifest in the world, and I believe that the fine arts are one such way. So, just as uncertainty and turbulence mark our days, I find also a sense of excitement and purpose as uncertainty becomes a call to rely on the grace of God and social isolation becomes a call and challenge to discover new ways of being present to others.

News from the Formation House in Mexico

After living in the novitiate, this is my first community as a professed marist. I was very excited because I would have a whole new community. I also felt even more belonging to this family and it made me nervous to think that I would have new responsibilities. My current community is made up of five members: Two pre-novices, who are already in their second year of philosophy, my brothers Eduardo Limón and David Romero. And two priests: Fr. Pedro Alarcón SM and Fr. Jean Vienne SM. This is my community.



What is the environment here in the house? It is an air of peace, but I think that what best defines our community is cooperation and mutual aid. We currently live in the parish of the Immaculate Conception and Fr. Pedro, is very active in his ministry, and the faithful love him.



Carlos

I think that cooperation and mutual aid has intensified in these days of quarantine: initiatives spontaneously arose to transmit the mass through social networks, so we helped Father Pedro in this. Cecilia, our dear cook, was asked to stay at home and now we all cook.

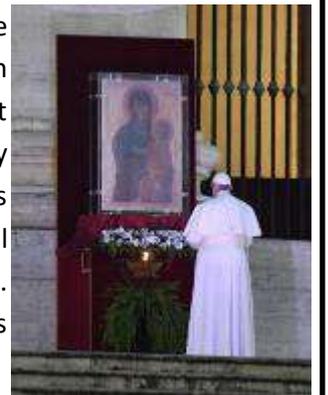


This community really changed many of my expectations: for example when I remember my formator, a year ago, doing his mission in the mountains despite his age. The experience of this community, is of the real family. This is our community: a small space in Nazareth where we live fraternal life with great openness.

May God and Mary be with you.

Carlos

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity. By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope.



"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Dear brothers and sisters, from this place that tells of Peter's rock-solid faith, I would like this evening to entrust all of you to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Health of the People and Star of the stormy Sea. From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God's blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace. Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: "Do not be afraid" (Mt 28:5). And we, together with Peter, "cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us" (cf. 1 Pet 5:7).

Pope Francis St Peter's Basilica Friday, 27 March 2020

The outbreak of the Covid 19, as we know has become a global affair now after hitting China so hard and other parts of the world like Italy, Spain, France, Germany, USA etc. It is so sad that the spread continues to some other areas, and people die in large numbers every day. Though timidly, there has been some recoveries. This is the sign of hope for the world. However, we must watch and pray.

Life for us here at Casa di Maria has been seriously affected. As we try to respect the state and ecclesiastical recommendations, some would just stay in their rooms when they feel a little sick for the good of others in the community; we would spread out during prayer and meals.

Last week, using Zoom and, grouped in four little groups by province or district, we followed some inputs from the Centre of Child Protection of the Pontifical Gregorian University. Besides, some of us study online using zoom. You can imagine the challenge for us students especially during this second semester.



My normal routine has been affected. Now it is sort of triangular: I leave my room to the Chapel, to the dining room and back to my room where I will spend the day reading, doing my assignments and relax sometimes by watching a movie. Since this situation became critical, we have been in the house. I can only remember going out just once.



Notwithstanding, I am trying to live this difficult moment by looking at the positive side of it. This moment of home confinement has given me the opportunity to each day ponder on my existence; to see how well I have lived as a Christian and as a religious; how not well I have lived and how better I can be. I recently had my spiritual direction on Skype. It was good we could pray and

discuss. It is also time for me to thank God for His love and grace. In everything, we must give thanks. God alone has the answer to all our many questions this time, and He is in control.

I call my family every day to give them feedback because they are worried about me. They are very concerned too with the situation here in Italy. I am worried about them as well. But my advice is for everyone to keep calm, get informed and stay constant in prayer.

MUKONG Gabriel Tim, SM





Who thought it would happen?

A misfortune has befallen the world and is continuing to spread terror. Covid-19 forced us into an unprecedented confinement and gives us much matter for thought. Our way of life, the existence of good and evil, the existence of God and the place of humans in the world are questioned. Everything has slowed down! The first reaction in front this situation would be to find who is behind that so it would ease our pain. But alas, the virus continues its carnage of contamination!

Certainly these existential questions are always prominent; but they seem much more relevant and real with this pandemic. From fear to doubt, from a feeling of revolt to that of helplessness, these are the feelings that inhabit our new daily life. We no longer know which saint to devote to!

However, in these difficult times when we experience our vulnerability and our human limits, hope never ceases to inhabit hearts. One is tempted to say that there is goodness even in complex situations. These moments, although hard, give us the opportunity to reconnect with those who are closest to us physically and that we often ignore. The 'good news' of confinement can mean putting your life in order, spending time in prayer and meditation, time to seek God and see the beauty of the other; a time which gives us the possibility of exploring other ways of being and living. Our response to this misfortune must therefore be animated by faith, hope and charity.

YOUM Youssouph Stev, SM



PRINCIPLES OF DEATH, PRINCIPLES OF LIFE



Since I left home at 14, I have not stopped being a gardener. And from what happened to me last week, it is convenient that I put it into writing. On Saturday afternoon, after eating with my community, Arnaldo suggested we make a visit to the abandoned garden, which is a bit far from our 4th floor. We went down with our tools to carry a little soil and to get new plants for our community. In the end, there were many small, slightly exotic plants there covered by grass. Indeed, it is a neglected garden. I did my best to extract some of them from that habitat and offer them something different. I looked for some pots; I prepared them and planted one by one. Especially this one that you see in the image. When replanting and watering it I said "welcome!"

Arnaldo laughed a little and said, "Why don't you tell the little plant that this is the best place for her?" I replied that I could not and should not. That she, the plant, had to make her experience

for herself. I didn't want to lie to her or chew on an experience instead, just like when someone wants to join the congregation we don't tell them to come because this is the best place. No, rather, we open our doors for everyone to have an experience.

Well, just two days later, the leaves of this small plant withered noticeably. Viewed from above, it doesn't look good at all. In fact, I thought about my possible failure to move it from its wild environment to our own. Today is the third day in which it was necessary to change the perspective in which I view this "warrior" and seen from below the sprout that comes from the center of the same root is evident and clearly visible.

This is what gives me so much encouragement: in the face of the obvious principles of death that confront us, it is possible, if we change our perspective, to find what in reality are principles of life. Today, because the corona virus causes us to keep our distance, without classes at the university, one tends to react like my little plant: we get upset, we think that "it's not so bad", that "those are pure tales –fake news". And we see with as much ease as with superficiality that our "leaves" decay quickly because we cannot leave, nor use transport, nor travel. Governments take care of their peoples by closing borders and airports; or those who get out of control and run to empty the food centers. It bothers us that they change our environment this drastically, in this manner, so unexpectedly. It seems we are forced to live longer with those members, married couples in their apartments, brothers or sisters in religious communities.

We like to be informed, influenced by opinions, and even adapt with some ease, even annoying. But there is still something to do: that after the three previous steps we allow ourselves to be "recreated" by the delicate situation. It sounds funny that here among us, that we are twenty brothers of community who are in a



continuous reconfiguration to maintain an active and healthy life. Yesterday we started taking food at a greater distance. A maximum of two or three brothers for each table. In fact a small group has to go to the room next to the dining room. And what to say about our cooks; they cannot come because nobody can leave their house. We have made a list and everyone is free to cook for the community. We who made vows to serve the poor would like to do pastoral care, and today we are all asked to stay home. There are not even any public Mass celebrations in the city.

Here we are recreating each other. I am getting to know my brothers more, I see them more and I see them better. We laugh more and know what we think. I didn't know, for example, that Arnaldo is a good cook. From eating all together to eating separately invites me to open myself to personal and direct communication. We have the time to better prepare our liturgies and celebrations. Or it may happen that there are those who only stay informed and isolated as long as possible not to get infected, not to die, especially when one needs to get some vegetables from the shop.

There are small gestures that show us that we are flourishing, and that in this delicate situation there are too those who suffer, and there are signs of life in our midst. A virus is mobilizing us all to recreate our social, family, and community environments for the better. It is true that it is not the end of the world. But will it be good to imagine what will happen when the virus has passed; will we have a better reality? Will I have a better relationship with my brothers, with my parents, with my neighbors? Maybe we still don't see the new shoots, but like this little one in our garden, it only requires a change of perspective and the ability to let ourselves be recreated and not just be informed.

From Europe, at least here in Rome we all celebrate Saint Joseph, following his example of silence. It is curious that the city lives this stillness, without so much movement of transport. From this silence, from this quietness, we pray and offer our celebrations for those who have lost their lives, and for all those willing to participate and receive Holy Communion.

Jaime Perez Martinez sm

(Below, our *Gentle Warrior* two weeks later...)

