

CBCP Monitor

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Pope Francis holds the monstrance as he delivers his extraordinary blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world) during a prayer service in the portico of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 27, 2020. The service was livestreamed in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. [CNS/VATICAN MEDIA](#)

Church focuses on poor during Covid-19 lockdown

By Roy Lagarde

The Catholic Church is doing what it can to provide relief for millions of poor Filipinos affected by the lockdown placed by the government to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

President Rodrigo Duterte on March 16 asked for understanding as he placed the entire Luzon region under a month-long lockdown, but said "stricter measures are necessary".

As the number of positive tests continue to rise everyday, more local governments across the country also enhanced quarantine measures.

Health officials have confirmed about 2,311 cases of coronavirus as of April 1, including at least 96 deaths.

The lockdowns, the Church said,

have been devastating for the poor even as they struggle with a potential Covid-19 health crisis.

"There are many brothers and sisters of ours who are affected financially by the long quarantine," said Archbishop Romulo Valles, the president of the bishops' conference.

Various parishes, religious congregations and church organizations have been doing their bit to make sure the poor will not go hungry.

Many of them have also stepped in to help and feed the frontliners who are working tirelessly to contain the Covid-19.

In Metro Manila, several Catholic schools and parishes opened their doors as temporary shelters for the homeless and medical frontliners in the battle against the disease.

"There are now more parishes and religious houses opening their facilities," said Bishop Broderick Pabillo, the apostolic administrator of Manila.



The San Isidro Labrador Parish in Bagong Silangan, Quezon City sets up a "drive thru" system as a way of distributing food to the needy while observing "social distancing" amid coronavirus concerns, March 20. [PHOTO FROM FR. GILBERT BILLENA, O. CARM.](#)

Poor / A6

As lockdown continues, faithful may send prayer requests online



With public masses still suspended, the CBCP Media has opened an online portal, where Catholics can send their Mass intention requests. [CBCPNEWS](#)

WONDERING where to request Mass intentions as lockdown continues in Luzon and other parts of the country?

The Media Office of the Catholic Bishops, Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has created an online platform on Friday to accept request for prayers.

Its director, Msgr Pedro Quitarro, said the faithful may now request for prayers through the website of CBCP News, the news service of the bishops' conference.

"Amid the Covid-19 crisis, we are encouraged to make good use of the digital

technology for our pastoral concerns and liturgical celebrations," he said.

To request for Mass intentions, CBCP News has provided a form on its website that may be used for such purpose.

Msgr. Quitarro said they will then ask priests to say Mass online for their intentions.

Though partially, CBCP News has also listed the "online Masses" offered in different dioceses throughout the country—as public Masses remain suspended due to coronavirus. ([CBCP News](#))

Vatican approves special 'Mass in the Time of Pandemic'

THE Vatican has asked priests around the world to recite a new prayer during this year's Good Friday liturgy, and urged them to offer Masses for the end of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Congregation for Divine Worship issued the new intention for the Solemn Intercessions during the Celebration of the Lord's Passion in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Solemn Intercessions, which are derived from ancient prayers, are recited on Good Friday for various categories of people. They include the pope; bishops, priests and deacons; the faithful; catechumens, other Christians; the Jewish people; those who do not believe in Christ; those who

do not believe in God; those in public office; and those in special need.

The new prayer is titled "For the afflicted in time of pandemic". It begins with the priest saying: "Let us pray also for all those who suffer the consequences of the current pandemic, that God the Father may grant health to the sick, strength to those who care for them, comfort to families and salvation to all the victims who have died."

After a moment of silent prayer, the priest continues: "Almighty ever-living God, only support of our human weakness, look with compassion upon the sorrowful condition of your children who suffer because of this

pandemic; relieve the pain of the sick, give strength to those who care for them, welcome into your peace those who have died and, throughout this time of tribulation, grant that we may all find comfort in your merciful love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

The new prayer was presented with a decree signed by the congregation's prefect, Cardinal Robert Sarah, and its secretary, Archbishop Arthur Roche.

The decree, dated March 30, said: "The Celebration of the Passion of the Lord on Good Friday this year has a particular significance because of the terrible pandemic that has stricken the whole world."

Pandemic / A6

San Carlos bishop joins calls for coronavirus mass testing

A CATHOLIC bishop has joined the calls for mass testing for coronavirus in the Philippines, as some analysts warned 26,000 people in the country are likely to be infected by end of March.

Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos agreed with a group of scientists that the widespread testing is "crucial" in containing the transmission of the virus.

"We wish to emphasize the

crucial role of mass testing," Alminaza said in March 24 statement.

He stressed that Singapore, South Korea and Japan were able to stem the spread of Covid-19 because of their fast, efficient and effective testing systems.

"We also wish to stress openness and transparency on the part of the government, which were key in the

Mass Testing / A6

Filipina nun dies of Covid-19 in Spain



Sr. Maria Gratia Balagot

A FILIPINA Benedictine nun has succumbed to coronavirus in Spain, her congregation reported on March 28.

Sr. Maria Gratia Balagot, who was the superior of their community in India, was only visiting Spain to renew her visa when she was infected with Covid-19.

"And while there, (she) contracted the virus," the US-based Missionary Benedictine Sisters – Norfolk

Nun / A6

Vatican Briefing

Vatican flags at half-staff in solidarity with coronavirus victims

Vatican flags are flying at half-staff on March 31 in solidarity with the victims of the coronavirus in Italy and worldwide. "Today, in solidarity with Italy, the Holy See will display flags at half-mast in mourning to express its closeness to the victims of the pandemic in Italy and in the world, to their families, and to all those who generously struggle for its end," Holy See Press Office Director Matteo Bruni told journalists March 31. Pope Francis met with the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte at the Vatican the day prior as the Italian government attempts to confront an outbreak which has led Italy to have the highest number of coronavirus mortalities in the world. **(Courtney Mares/CNA)**

As people are ordered to stay home, pope calls for help for homeless

As national and local governments have been issuing stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders to curb the spread of the coronavirus, Pope Francis asked people to pray for and assist those who are homeless. He offered his morning Mass March 31 for those who are homeless "at a time when people are asked to stay at home." At the start of a livestreamed Mass from the chapel of his residence, the pope prayed that people become aware of all those who lack shelter and housing and help them and that the church would "welcome them." **(Carol Glatz/CNS)**

Vatican publishes document on right to water access

Access to clean water is an essential human right that must be defended and protected, the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development said in a new document. Defending the right to clean water is part of the Catholic Church's promotion of the common good, "not some particular national agenda," the dicastery said, calling for "a management of water so as to ensure universal and sustainable access to it for the future of life, the planet and the human community." The 46-page document, titled "Aqua Fons Vitae: Orientations on Water, Symbol of the Cry of the Poor and the Cry of the Earth," was released by the Vatican March 30. **(Junno Arocho Esteves/CNS)**

Pope offers Mass for those living in fear of pandemic

Pope Francis offered his daily morning Mass for those who find themselves living in fear of the coronavirus pandemic sweeping the world. "Let us pray today for the many people who cannot cope, who remain frightened by this pandemic. May the Lord help them to stand up, to react for the good of all society and the entire community," the pope said March 30 at the start of his livestreamed Mass. In his homily, the pope reflected on the day's first reading and Gospel, which recalled the stories of two women—one falsely accused and the other caught in the act of sin—who faced death sentences. **(Junno Arocho Esteves/CNS)**

Vatican confirms pope does not have COVID-19

Neither Pope Francis nor any of his closest collaborators have the COVID-19 virus, said Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office. In a note March 28, Bruni confirmed that a monsignor, who works in the Vatican Secretariat of State and lives in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, where Pope Francis lives, did test positive for the coronavirus and, "as a precaution," was hospitalized. The Italian newspaper Il Messaggero and the Jesuit-run America magazine published reports March 25 about the monsignor testing positive. Bruni said that as of March 28, the Vatican health service had conducted more than 170 tests for the virus. No one else who lives at the Domus Sanctae Marthae tested positive, Bruni said. **(Cindy Wooden/CNS)**

'Gospel of life' needed now more than ever, pope says

Defending life is not an abstract concept but a duty for all Christians and it means protecting the unborn, the poor, the sick, the unemployed and migrants, Pope Francis said. Even though humanity is living in "the age of universal human rights," it continues to face "new threats and new slaveries" as well as legislation that "is not always in place to protect the weakest and most vulnerable human life," the pope said March 25 during a live broadcast of his weekly general audience from the library of the Apostolic Palace. "Every human being is called by God to enjoy the fullness of life," he said. And because all human beings are "entrusted to the maternal care of the church, every threat to human dignity and life cannot fail to be felt in her heart, in her maternal 'womb.'" **(Junno Arocho Esteves/CNS)**

If you can't go to confession, take your sorrow directly to God, pope says

People who cannot get to confession because of the coronavirus lockdown or another serious reason can go to God directly, be specific about their sins, request pardon and experience God's loving forgiveness, Pope Francis said. "This is the right time, the opportune moment. An act of contrition done well, and our souls will become white like the snow," the pope said March 20 during his livestreamed morning Mass. Pope Francis began the Mass by praying again for doctors, especially in northern Italy, where the COVID-19 pandemic still is infecting thousands and leading to the deaths of hundreds of people each day. **(Cindy Wooden/CNS)**

How CRS is helping refugees amid coronavirus



A Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. Credit: DFID (CC BY 2.0).

DHAKA, Bangladesh— There are nearly 700,000 refugees living in close quarters in the world's largest refugee settlements in Bangladesh, making them vulnerable as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic spreads.

Caroline Brennan, Catholic Relief Services' emergency communications director, told CNA that in areas where CRS is serving refugees, such as in Bangladesh, they are adapting their programs as quickly as possible so they are still relevant and safe during the pandemic.

"In this case, when we're looking at a virus like the coronavirus...there is such a heightened vulnerability in these settlements, where you have very large populations in extremely congested environments, and where multi-generational family members are

living in really tight quarters," Brennan said.

Many countries have adopted stay-at-home orders and strict social distancing measures in response to the virus. For the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh, Brennan said, and in many other areas where refugees are, it can be almost impossible for people to distance themselves from others in this way.

There may be up to ten people living in a small space with nowhere else to go, she said, which means access to safe space is a problem, as well as access to the means for refugees to keep clean.

In addition, Bangladeshi authorities fear that the coming cyclone season will cause sewage to overflow into flimsy shelters and possibly spread the coronavirus, the New York Times reported this week.

Brennan said CRS, along with local

partners, has been providing hygiene and sanitation supplies to the camps, as well as training and materials for local health institutions.

One of the biggest priorities, Brennan said, is simply communicating information about how to protect oneself from the virus, but doing so in the camps in a safe way.

"Obviously, we don't want to bring people together in large groups," she said.

"And often times, that's how you conduct programming— bringing people together for a training or bringing children together in a classroom."

CRS has had to adapt to using large posters, printed in several languages, to get the word out rather than gathering people in groups to convey information about how to keep themselves safe from the virus, Brennan said. **(CNA)**

During coronavirus, Rome's homeless find refuge near the Vatican

ROME Italy— Along the edge of Bernini's colonnade, the semi-circular rows of columns which wrap St. Peter's Square in Rome, many homeless spend time during the day and sleep at night, as tourists and locals walk by.

But during the coronavirus pandemic, which has led Italian authorities to lock down the country, close St. Peter's Square, and order everyone to stay home, where can those with nowhere to go find shelter?

There are an estimated 8,000 homeless in Rome, according to Massimiliano Signifredi, communications director for Sant'Egidio, a Catholic community and volunteer network based in Rome.

"Unfortunately, no one has thought of these people," he told CNA. "These people are at risk, not only because of the virus, but because of isolation."

Of those 8,000 homeless, he explained that around



An elderly homeless man walks along the colonnade of St. Peter's Square, March 15, 2020, days after their closure to tourists. ANDREAS SOLARO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

3,000 will not be able to find room in shelters across the city, and instead choose "to live at the train stations and at places like St. Peter's Square, which continues to be a place of refuge for those without a home."

During the coronavirus pandemic, with the streets abandoned and bars and restaurants closed, "those who do not have a home find themselves in great difficulty," Signifredi said.

"Even to go to the bathroom is a problem without a house; and to wash your hands frequently, like we should, you cannot do if you are on the street."

One state police officer who works near the Vatican, and who spoke to CNA on condition of anonymity, said one of the places where many homeless typically sleep at night—under the gallery of one of the nearby buildings—is now empty.

But the outer edge of Bernini's colonnade still hosts many of its usual guests, though numbers are slightly reduced. "Some people really do not want to go; they prefer to stay outside," the officer said, adding that the police cannot force anyone to go to a shelter against his or her wish.

Despite added risks, the services for homeless men and women near the Vatican have continued uninterrupted, including the papal charities-run showers and bathrooms, located under and between the right colonnade and a Vatican wall.

Now, volunteers take names in the morning of people wanting to use the facilities, and police use the lists to allow those people to enter the area, accessible only through the closed square.

Sant'Egidio and another Catholic charity, Caritas Roma, continuing to distribute food to people in need according to their usual schedules. **(CNA)**

First bishop known to die of coronavirus was missionary in Ethiopia

CNA Staff— The Italian bishop of a missionary region of Ethiopia is the first Catholic bishop known to have died of the global coronavirus pandemic. He died March 25.

Bishop Angelo Moreschi, 67, was the leader of Ethiopia's Apostolic Vicariate of Gambella, a missionary region of 25,000 Catholics in the western part of the country. He died Wednesday in the Italian city of Brescia, in the Lombardy region that has become the European epicenter of the pandemic.

A member of the Salesians of Don Bosco religious order, Moreschi had been a missionary in Ethiopia since 1991. He was ordained a bishop in January 2010.

"The Salesian community mourns

the death of the Apostolic Vicar of Gambella (Ethiopia), namely Msgr. Angelo Moreschi, SDB, who died today, March 25, in Brescia (Italy) due to the coronavirus," the Salesians of Don Bosco said in a statement released through the order's information bureau.

The secretary general of Ethiopia's bishops' conference announced the news in the country, announced conveying "deep condolences to the Clergy, religious, bereaved family and the lay faithful in the Apostolic Vicariate of Gambella."

To the mourning people of the Gambella vicariate, the country's bishops pledged the "closeness and prayers of members of the Catholic

Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia and the entire Catholic Church in Ethiopia. May his soul rest in peace."

Bishop Moreschi was renowned in Ethiopia for his pastoral ministry to the service of young people and the poor. In the local dialect, he was afforded the title "Abba," meaning "Father."

Bishop Moreschi died "after serving the young, the poor and his flock of souls as a Salesian for 46 years, as a priest for 38, and as a bishop for over 10," the Salesians said.

More than 60 priests have died in the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which has claimed more than 21,000 lives globally. Several bishops have contracted the virus. **(CNA)**

Pope Francis warns of a coronavirus 'genocide' if economy prioritized over people

VATICAN— In a private letter to an Argentine judge, Pope Francis is reported to have warned that government decisions to prioritize the economy over people could result in a “viral genocide.”

“The governments that face the crisis in this way show the priority of their decisions: the people first. ... It would be sad if they opted for the opposite, which would lead to the death of very many people, something like a viral genocide,” Pope Francis wrote in a letter sent March 28, according to America Magazine, which reported it had obtained the letter.

The pope sent a handwritten note in response to a letter from Judge Roberto Andres Gallardo, the president of the Pan-American Committee of Judges for Social Rights, Argentine news agency Telam reported March 29.

“We are all concerned at the increase ... of the pandemic,” Pope Francis wrote, while praising some governments for “adopting exemplary measures with priorities that are well targeted at defending the population” and serving “the common good.”

The pope also said he was “edified by the response of so many people, doctors, nurses, volunteers, religious, priests, who risk their lives to heal and defend healthy



Pope Francis during his weekly General Audience on April 1, 2020. VATICAN MEDIA

people from contagion,” Telam reported.

Pope Francis recounted in the letter that he has been in discussions with the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development to “prepare ourselves for what follows”

the global coronavirus outbreak.

“There are already some consequences that must be faced: hunger, especially for people without permanent work, violence, the appearance of usurers (who are the true plague of a social future,

dehumanized criminals),” he wrote, according to Telam.

The pope’s letter also cited the economist Dr. Mariana Mazzucato, whose published work argues that state intervention can drive growth and innovation.

“I believe [her vision] can help to think about the future,” he wrote in the letter, which also mentioned Mazzucato’s book “The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy,” according to America Magazine.

To combat the spread of the coronavirus, at least 174 countries have implemented COVID-19 related travel restrictions, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

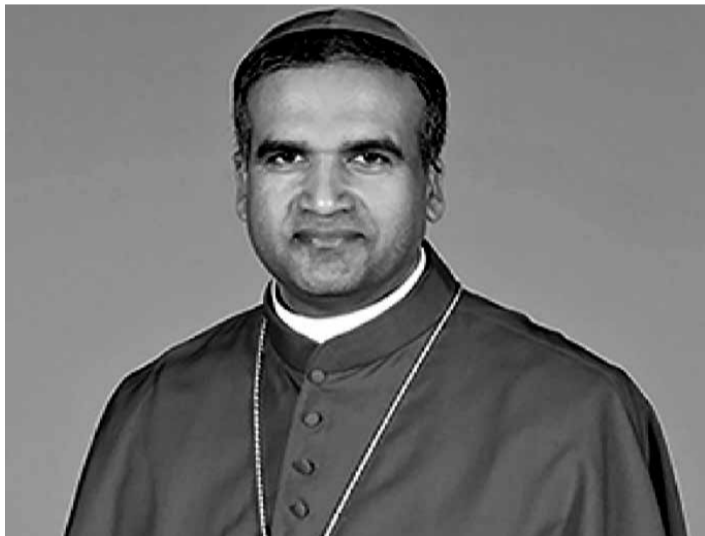
Argentina was one of the first Latin American countries to implement strict coronavirus restrictions prohibiting entry to foreigners on March 17 and implemented a 12-day mandatory quarantine on March 20.

There have been 820 documented coronavirus cases in Argentina and 22 deaths from COVID-19.

“The choice is to take care of the economy or take care of lives. I chose to take care of lives,” Argentine President Alberto Fernandez said March 25, according to Bloomberg.

Global documented coronavirus cases have surpassed 745,000 confirmed cases, of which more than 100,000 cases are in Italy and 140,000 in the United States, reports the Italian Ministry of Health and Johns Hopkins University respectively. (Courney Mares/CNA)

Indian bishop condemns ‘shocking’ disinfectant spray of migrant workers



Bishop Ignatius D'Souza. DIOCESE OF BAREILLY

A BISHOP in India has condemned the spraying of migrant workers and their children with disinfectant, after a video posted to Twitter showed public health authorities doing exactly that.

The video was posted to Twitter Sunday. The Times of India reported that families at a bus stand in the northern Indian city of Bareilly were told to sit on the ground, and were then sprayed with a bleaching agent mixed with water.

In the video, parents and their children sat on the streets of Bareilly and are showered with a chemical solution of chlorine mixed with water. Men in hazmat suits can be heard telling the migrants to close their eyes and mouths.

Bishop Ignatius D'Souza of Bareilly said spraying migrant workers with disinfectant was inhumane.

“This is inhuman, because these people are poor and marginalized and desperate our migrants labourers and their families. Their dignity cannot be violated in this inhuman and shocking manner,” the bishop said, according to Asia News.

Minister Narendra Modi placed the country on lockdown as cases of COVID-19 in India have reached 1,251. The lockdown has closed down borders and forced migrant workers in India’s largest cities to return home to their villages.

Ashok Gautam, an officer in charge of COVID-19 operations in northern India, told CNN that as many as 5,000 people have been similarly disinfected before

being allowed to return home. “We sprayed them here as part of the disinfection drive, we don’t want them to be carriers for the virus and it could be hanging on their clothes, now all borders have been sealed so this won’t happen again,” he said.

Other government officials said the disinfectant was really meant for the buses and that the incident was a mistake. Lav Agarwal, an official of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said Monday that workers involved in the incidents have been reprimanded.

“This is an overzealous action done by some employees at the field level, either out of ignorance or fear,” he said, according to CNN.

D’Souza emphasized the difficulties facing vulnerable people returning to their home villages, noting that the Church in Bareilly has been distributing food packets to those who arrive.

He said they have delivered these packages to displaced people located at bus and train stations.

The bishop added that wealthy and well-known people with COVID-19 have been treated differently than poor people in India, according to Asia News. He said everyone needs to be treated with human dignity.

“Each person has to be treated with human dignity, the celebrities who tested positive in India (who travelled to Lucknow), received best treatment, our poor people do not deserve this indignity, it’s an affront against the dignity of the human person.” (CNA)

Priests arrested for public Mass celebrations during coronavirus shutdowns

Amid lockdowns responding to the coronavirus pandemic, at least three priests were arrested Sunday, March 29, for celebrating Mass publicly, in alleged defiance of government orders banning religious gatherings during the pandemic.

In Uganda, Fr. Deogratius Kiibi Kateregga was arrested March 29 for celebrating Mass at St Joseph’s Catholic Parish in Mpigi, Uganda. There were reportedly at least 15 Catholics in attendance at the Mass.

The priest is well-known in Uganda, and came to national notoriety after a televised 2018 sermon at the memorial Mass for a Ugandan musician, Mowzey Radio, who died from injuries sustained in a bar fight.

Local officials said the priest was arrested along with seven other Catholics and was detained at the Mpigi police station.

“He was found preaching in the church in contravention of the presidential directives,” said Herbert Nuwagaba, the Mpigi District Police



Fr. Deogratius Kiibi Kateregga during a Mass at a village in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, in 2014. PHOTO FROM HCFM – EAST AFRICA

Commander.

“We want him to tell us why he is doing this,” Godfrey Matovu, the Mpigi District Internal Security Officer, told the Daily Monitor.

The priest was released after parishioners protested on his behalf at the police station, according to local media reports.

On March 18, Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni suspended religious and cultural gatherings for at least 32 days in an attempt to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Uganda currently has 30 cases of the coronavirus.

In India’s Kerala state, two priests, two seminarians, and three religious sisters were charged with violating government orders after a Mass celebrated in a chapel at the minor seminary of the Congregation of Missionaries of Faith in the Wayanad district of Kerala.

All seven were released after their arrest, according to UCA News, with a warning not to repeat their actions.

Father Manoj Kakkonal,

a spokesman for the Mananthavady diocese, told UCA News that the arrest “seems to be a case of misunderstanding,” because the Mass in question was celebrated inside the seminary chapel. The priests and seminarians are residents of the seminary, UCA News reported.

The police were reportedly called after neighbors saw the religious sisters arrive at the chapel.

Indian prime minister Narendra Modi instituted a 21-day lockdown on March 24.

Another arrest took place in Kerala on March 23, when Fr. Paul Padayatti from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Koodapuzha celebrated a requiem Mass at which more than 100 people attended. Kerala officials also said there have been two other incidents where authorities issued warning to priests conducting Mass.

As of March 29, India has reported 980 cases of COVID-19 and 24 deaths related to the outbreak, according to the New York Times. (CNA)

Vatican statistics show decline in number of consecrated men, women

VATICAN— The decrease in the number of religious brothers and of women in religious orders is “worrying,” according to the Vatican statistics office.

While the number of religious brothers in Africa and Asia continues to increase, the number of religious brothers worldwide experienced an 8% drop between 2013 and 2018, while the number of women religious fell 7.5% globally in the same period, the Vatican Central Office for Church Statistics reported.

However, the number of baptized Catholics increased by 6% between 2013 and 2018, reaching 1.33 billion or almost 18% of the global population, the statistics office reported March 25.

The figures are presented in the “Anuario Pontificio 2020,” the Vatican yearbook, and will appear in the Statistical Yearbook of the Church, which gives detailed figures on the church’s workforce, sacramental life, dioceses and parishes. The statistics are based on figures valid as of Dec. 31, 2018.

The region with the highest proportion of Catholics, the yearbook reported, is in North and South America with “63.7 Catholics per 100 inhabitants,” followed by Europe with 39.7 Catholics, Oceania

with 26.3 and Africa with 19.4 Catholics for every 100 inhabitants.

Asia, the report noted, has the lowest percentage of Catholics in the general population, making up 3.3 Catholics for every 100 inhabitants due to “the great spread of non-Christian denominations in the continent.”

The number of bishops of the world continued to increase in 2018, reaching 5,337 worldwide compared to 5,173 in 2013.

The report also stated that while the total number of priests—diocesan and religious order—around the world increased slightly—by 0.3% in the 2013-2018 period—the numbers “appear rather disappointing overall.”

Europe, it said, showed a decrease of more than 7% in 2018 alone, while the decline in Oceania was a little over 1%. The decline in both continents account for the low numbers worldwide.

However, the 14.3% increase of priests in Africa and 11% in Asia over 2013-2018 “is quite comforting,” while numbers in North and South America “remain stationary,” the report said.

The yearbook also said that the number of permanent deacons is “rapidly evolving,” noting a significant increase from 43,195 in 2013 to 47,504



This April 14, 2017 photo shows a Franciscan priest greeting two nuns in Jerusalem. DEBBIE HILL/CNS

in 2018.

The number of candidates for the priesthood—both in diocesan seminarians and in religious orders—who had reached the level of philosophy and theology studies showed “a slow and gradual” downturn.

The number of priesthood candidates fell to 115,880 men at the end of 2018 compared to 118,251 men at the end of 2013, with Europe as well as North and South America accounting for the largest reduction in numbers.

Nevertheless, the report stated, “Africa, with a positive variation of 15.6%, confirms that it is the geographical area with the greatest potential to cover the needs of pastoral services.” (Junno Arocho Esteves/CNS)

EDITORIAL

Church in action

TRUE to the Gospel, the Catholic church is not wont to parading its good deeds. On Ash Wednesday, it admonishes the faithful: “when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” (Mt 6:3). But this is about not being in the league of the Pharisees who perform deeds to solicit praises from people and gratify their bloated ego. In terms of the Christian mission to be light of the word, the mandate is “not to light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, so that it may shine to all who are in the house.” (Mt. 5:15)

The hashtag #ChurchInAction has been circulating in social media early in the Covid-19 pandemic. Some Catholics have been posting and sharing in social media what several dioceses and religious groups have been doing to ease the impact of the current crisis, especially among the poor and the frontliners.

At the forefront is Caritas Manila that has given out more than a billion-peso worth of gift-certificates, grocery vouchers, Covid safety kits, among others, to about four million households. Several parishes and catholic schools, spearheaded by those in Metro Manila, opened their doors as temporary shelters for the homeless and medical frontliners. Several social action centers and parishes throughout the country responded with their “kindness stations” that provided food packs to the poor that are the most vulnerable in these times of crises.

Early on, Archbishop Romulo Valles, president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, encouraged dioceses to create programs and systems to reach out to the needy. Yearning that “prayer move us to action,” he said, “This is a time of difficulty but also a time for growing in true discipleship as we strive to follow the Lord in selfless love and service to others.”

When in a crisis

DEFINITELY, when we are in some especially difficult situation like what we are having nowadays with the coronavirus pandemic, we should band together, close ranks and help one another in any way we can.

Everyone, from those in position of government to the lowest citizen of the community, should care for one another. Our differences and conflicts in some issues should take a backseat, at least temporarily. They can be attended to at some other time. Like in the hospitals when there are just too many patients seeking attention and admission, we have to do some triage.

When our very own life, health and survival of our society are under threat, let’s work together to tackle the problem together, and avoid bickering, complaining, fault-finding and the other etceteras of negative activities among ourselves.

If we notice certain aspects of the problem to be disregarded or are given inadequate attention, then let’s bring them out to the proper authorities. But this should be done always in the proper tone, with great delicacy albeit with utter clarity, especially when the matter involved is considered urgent.

But if we ourselves can already do something about these aspects of the problem, then let’s do it ourselves without unnecessarily bothering the others or the higher entities in our society. It’s part of the principle of subsidiarity that should govern our social, collective life. The other two are those of the common good and solidarity. It would be good if we once again review these social principles.

When our government orders some drastic measures like lockdown or quarantine, etc., to tackle the problem of the coronavirus, we have to presume that things are studied well and that these extreme measures are resorted to with good measure of prudence—that is, to avoid a greater harm and damage to the people and to our society in general.

I know that some of us may feel that such measures are an over-reaction, and that they fail to consider the unpleasant implications on some sectors of our society. Truth is they are indeed a bitter pill to take. No question about that.

But if we consider what is happening in other countries that are affected by the same problem and what they did to tackle that problem, then we should understand why such measures have to be resorted to.

Yes, no doubt everyone suffers, though in different ways and in different degrees. That consequence cannot be helped. That is just part of our human condition here on earth, whether we are in good times or in bad.

That is why we should just help one another. Those who are stronger among us, better positioned, favored or endowed should give a helping hand to those who are weaker and less fortunate. This is where the social principles of the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity should get into action. This crisis can be a wonderful occasion to find new and creative ways to help one another.

Besides, if we are genuine Christians, we already know and are assured that everything will always work out for the good. (cfr. Rome 8,28) We already know that whatever suffering we would undergo here can have positive, constructive and salvific effect on us. Christ takes care of everything. What we cannot do, he can do it. What is impossible to us is always possible to him.

So, we should not worry too much and waste our time fighting each other over some perceived inadequacies, missteps and mistakes that others, especially our public officials, may commit. Let’s just be sport about everything. We cannot avoid some mistakes and setbacks from happening. But these should not stop us from moving on.

Instead of focusing on the mistakes and raising complaints, let us find solutions and offer some help. The very least that we can do and can be done always is to pray and offer sacrifices.



ILLUSTRATION BY ZACH BORRONE



Living Mission

Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM

THE Second Vatican Council in its ecumenism document, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, clearly affirms the value of other Christian churches and eclesial communities. Indeed, there are authentic elements of what constitutes a “church” in various Christian communities outside the Catholic Church; all should value and respect these genuine “eclesial elements.”

Some examples of our mutual gifts are: Sacred Scripture, various sacraments, the life of grace, the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts, the virtues of faith, hope and charity, and even certain church institutions. These mutual gifts can be put at the service of a variety of people; they can also enhance the effectiveness of mission and evangelization in today’s world.

Other Christian communities may lack some of the structures that Catholics view as essential to being a church (e.g. the apostolic succession of bishops or a valid Eucharist). However, “the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation” (UR 3). Indeed, God uses these communities to save their members. Briefly stated, non-Catholic Christians are brought to salvation not *despite* their churches, but *because* and *through* them. Thus, we rejoice in God’s magnanimous, merciful love and compassion!

Practicing Ecumenism. The Vatican Council invited Catholics to begin actual ecumenical practices, not waiting until full communion is restored. Concrete ecumenical endeavors actually serve to move forward the progress toward Christian unity.

One may cite various concrete steps that can foster the ecumenical movement: (1) we avoid all negative stereotypes or false assumptions about other Christians; (2) dialogues between experts and leaders of various churches are encouraged; (3) members of various churches join mutual projects or initiatives that serve the poor and needy; (4) Christians may join in common prayer when appropriate; and, (5) each church commits itself to its own personal reform, self-renewal, conversion and transformation.

These various practices are encouraged in *Unitatis Redintegratio* in its second chapter (UR 5-12), entitled: “The Practice of Ecumenism.” There are opportunities to *pray together* (UR 5-8), *learn together* (UR 9-11), and *work together* (UR 12). All these common initiatives can pave the road toward Christian unity.

A Change of Heart is Needed. In promoting ecumenical practice, the Second Vatican Council noted that there can be no authentic ecumenism without sincere conversion and a change of

heart. This is true because Christians often fail to live by the truths of their faith. Thus, the Church gives us the season of Lent each year as a time of purification, renewal, and conversion. Recall that at each Mass we begin by asking pardon for our sins and offenses.

Vatican II noted: “All the faithful should remember that the more effort they make to live holier lives according to the Gospel, the better they will further Christian unity and put it into practice. For the closer their union with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly love” (UR 7). Only with “renewed hearts” will all Christians make progress toward genuine fraternity and unity!

Knowing Our Christian Neighbors. Practical ecumenism begins with knowing and appreciating our “separated brethren,” our Christian neighbors. Since in our times cooperation in social matters (peace, justice, ecology, human rights) is widely valued and promoted, all Christians without exception are exhorted to engage in united social efforts. This imperative is laid upon all Christians, since they have been baptized in the name of Christ the Servant. Indeed, genuine ecumenism enhances our knowledge, appreciation, and service of our neighbors!

SHIT in the time of COVID

THE following was forwarded to me, and instead of trashing it because of its title and its unknown origin (although its references are mostly Christian), I gave it a chance—and I am thankful I did. It’s not as offensive as its “cover” made it seem. So I urge you to read before you judge. Here goes:

Since this pandemic first burst out of Wuhan, the world has been increasingly abuzz trying to demystify it with the primary concern of staying untouched by it. The lockdown has forced

us indoors and wired 24/7, forwarding both facts and fake news, coping advice, quirky inputs from irrepressible YouTubers, and of course, chain prayer requests. Self-serving prayers have turned PRAY into another four-letter word. Well, here’s a real four-letter word that doesn’t care a hoot about sounding clean: SHIT, an acronym for four Be-attitudes.

Be Sober: For goodness sake, be still! Don’t panic and hoard. It’s not the end of the world, and even if you die next week, you cannot

take all that toilet paper and corned beef to the grave. So what if you run out of rice? Eat boiled kamote and vegetables even if you hate them, because you know they are way healthier than your favorite junk food and can boost your immune system. Obey health rules, get some sun, exercise. Even those who live in hovels or under the bridge can walk in place. Stop being obsessed with survival; you could also catch the virus at a supermarket queue. Be a sensible and sobering influence in your

community. Remember panic and paranoia can also kill. Replace internet time with meaningful conversations with family members. “Bonding” is a big word today; might as well be, for no one knows when one could get infected and die. Take advantage of the quarantine period to organize your neglected tasks. Whether you’re sick or not, do your family a favour and write your (Last) Will and Testament; that should take away a lot of headaches

And That’s The Truth / A7

And That’s The Truth

Teresa R. Tunay, OCDS



Candidly Speaking

Fr. Roy Cimagala

OF course, not! If at all, this extraordinary time we are having these days because of the coronavirus pandemic is a clear invitation for us to learn to live for the future. In fact, it is

offering us an opportunity to learn to live for eternity. We should be happy about this development. This pandemic is a clear blessing in disguise.

Yes, we have to learn to detach ourselves from time, whether it is the prehistoric era, ancient, dark ages, medieval, modern or contemporary time. More precisely said, while we live in time, we have to learn to transcend it, setting our mind and heart always on eternity where we are meant to be in our definitive state.

It does not really matter what part of earthly time we live in. What matters is that we know how to relate our time to eternity, the natural to the supernatural, the material to the spiritual. Thus, we should learn how to drop and leave everything behind when the time comes for us to enter the eternal life, and be ready to face our Father and Creator.

Our usual problem is that we tend to get swallowed up by our earthly condition of time and nature, ignoring the far richer reality of our definitive life with God in heaven for all eternity. If we would just know the ultimate parameters of our life as provided by our Christian faith, then we would not really mind what historical era and culture we

belong to, since we would know how to relate our here and now to our definitive life beyond.

The things in this world and life only have a relative value. They are meant to offer us the means, the reason and the occasion to relate ourselves to God from whom we come and to whom we belong in a most intimate way. It is our relation with God that has absolute value. Everything else follows from there.

And so, with the new conditions that now are imposed on us, like the lockdown, quarantine, curfew, the social distancing, disinfecting, etc., which perhaps may force us to do things that we usually do not do anymore, like cooking

Candidly Speaking / A7

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PROTAGONIST OF TRUTH, PROMOTER OF PEACE

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Whisper from the Desert

Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSSR, STD

THE corona-virus that started in Wuhan-China has spread to all parts of the world including the Philippines. A total lockdown or enhanced quarantine has been imposed to contain its exponential spread. Nobody knows how long this will last. How should we spend our time under lock-down? Here are some suggestions:

1. Appreciate this period of physical isolation, solitude and silence. This is a time of sabbath rest. Consider this as a prolonged retreat.
2. If you are living with others, maintain interaction and but observe physical distance (one meter, no touch). Join common meals. Spend time in prayer and sharing with each other the Word of God. Watch online Mass especially on Sunday. This is the best time to strengthen the bond of relationship as a household/community.
3. Observe proper hygiene—constantly wash your hands, clean and disinfect surroundings (especially doorknobs).
4. Be well rested, avoid stress. Get adequate sleep (7-8 hrs). Avoid activities that can disrupt sleep patterns (binge watching online movies/TV series, unlimited FB/social media engagement).
5. Practice meditation (focus on breathing and mindfulness, centering

Living under the COVID-19 lockdown

prayer, meditative recitation of the rosary)—holistic method of deepening spirituality, managing stress as well as boosting your immune system.

6. Observe healthy diet (mostly plant-based). Fish & meat consumption is not essential—there are other sources of protein (rice & beans, eggs). Human beings can survive on one meal a day—this is called intermittent fasting which maximizes the utilization of fat deposits (ketones) as fuel for the body and boost immune system—mobilizing the doctor and pharmacy within our body. This can help also in cutting down food expenses. Caloric restriction is the only proven means of extending one's life (eat less, live longer). Grow your own food. Take vitamin supplements (C & D). Sunlight is best source of Vitamin D.

7. Since you cannot go out for a walk or a jog, do indoor high intensity exercise (weights, push-ups, etc), walk around your garden (if you have one) or go up and down the stairs. Do Tai-chi or calisthenics.

8. Spend time in reading—feed your mind, update yourself of what's happening, learn something new. Read the bible and other spiritual books.

9. Do something productive or creative: work at home/in your room,

write, do research, work on projects, learn a new language, pursue your hobby, gardening, play and listen to music, compose songs and poems, start a diary, etc.

10. Maintain social contact with family members, friends and colleagues through the internet/social media. Give them updates on what is happening. Share with them what you are doing, your thoughts and feelings. Participate in online meetings/conferences/webinars, etc. Continue to exercise your prophetic mission online: share the Gospel & bring hope, denounce social evils (including incompetent/corrupt leaders and their minions who are responsible for the culture of death, the spread of this virus, climate change, etc.). Continue your advocacies. In spite of the physical isolation we are still interconnected. We can maintain solidarity with others by being part of the virtual community and movement. While observing appropriate physical distance, reach out to those living nearby. Greet them from afar. Occasionally break the silence by sharing your music from your balcony or rooftop. Find out how you can help especially those in need. Share your resources with those who are less fortunate.



Inside Out

Fr. Spencer Lewerenz

Meditations from the dark valley

THE world has entered a valley of shadows. We don't know where we are going or when it will end. We feel lost. I am a priest, but I am lost in this valley with you. No matter how much I have tried to gain a sense of direction over the past weeks, it keeps slipping through my fingers, leaving me more lost and confused than I was before. My parish is locked and empty. We have no collections and thus no money to pay our staff. (Most of them have now been put indefinitely on "furlough.") I feel blessed to be healthy, to have a place to sleep and something to eat, but I don't know what my purpose is anymore. I celebrate mass in front of a church that is empty except for some people operating a camera. I can only talk to the faithful from a distance, through a phone or other device. I thought I had become a priest to answer the world's need, to be part of a "field hospital." But now that the world is needier than ever, I am told the best thing I can do is stay in my room. My priesthood seems useless.

The scriptures tell us that "By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, in quiet and in trust shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15) and that God shepherds his flock "beside restful waters" so that we may not fear the dark valley. Something in me resists this invitation to spiritual rest. It doesn't seem like enough. It seems like I must invent a new, perhaps even busier schedule, chart new goals, projects, achievements... Gain some clarity and direction. But I know this is vanity. Our Shepherd leads the way into the valley, into the rest, into the dark.

My insecurity about my purpose and my worth have been there all along, subconscious credos directing my behavior. Only now, in slowing down, have I been able to recognize them. It is disorienting, for certain. But the Shepherd leads us into the valley so that we can face our fears, sit with them, and see them for what they are: lies, phantoms, sweet little nothings, selling a false bill of goods. God wants to expose the lies so that we can see that there is nothing to be afraid of. He loves us no matter what. We can simply sit in the quiet and trust him. We have gotten so good at justifying and proving ourselves that it is hard to stop. But stop is what we must do. Stop in the name of love. Beside his still waters, we can stop avoiding him and let him love us and tell us we are okay... and more than okay, his beloved.

Let us follow our Shepherd into the dark valley and notice some of the lies we may have believed:

"I need to feel useful and be working/helping/providing": Some of us feel worthless and lazy when we aren't working, providing for our families, or helping others. We have become overachievers who find our worth in our ability to help, provide, and please, but inside we are missing something. We are like Martha of Bethany, whom Jesus says is "anxious and troubled" from always serving (Luke 10). Many of us are busy and troubled because we do not know that our true worth is not in what we do. Now that we are required to stay home, we have an excuse to slow down and sit with our feeling of needing to serve. We can sit still and let God disprove the lie that we need to earn love. This is closely related to...

"I need to feel relevant / like I have a role": This is a lie that we are facing as a Church. Sometimes we find our worth in our roles as ministers and teachers running our programs and ministries for the faithful. We find affirmation in feeling useful. But now our churches are locked or empty and we have had to cancel our prayer meetings and sacramental classes. We no longer have the faithful to affirm us in our roles. Perhaps we feel a little lost and like we need to scramble to find a new role for ourselves. This past week at my parish we were busy trying to move our operations online. Perhaps we could have taken more time to sit in silence with our feelings of being irrelevant.

"I need to be the hero": Western culture exalts "the Hero Myth" of "Great Men and Women" who change history and save worlds. Everyone wants to be a superhero or a saint, one of "the good guys" who proves his goodness through righteous acts. We priests especially fall into this category. These past weeks, I have wrestled with the notion that I can't minister to some of our sick and homebound because I could put their health at risk. A hero wouldn't let illness come between the faithful and the sacraments, right? I have had to sit with the realization that this inclination is to some degree a "saviour complex": me making my ministry about me. Sometimes the best thing we can do for each other is simply to be still and feel our helplessness, trusting that there is a God who cares more for the vulnerable than we do.

"My family is my world": For many of us, life revolves around family. Our identity is deeply connected to maintaining family ties. Many people feel responsible for their families, and feel guilty about being cut off from them for any period of time. Though we are told to honor father and mother, Jesus is clear his family are those who "hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). In Christ, the love of the Father introduces us to a whole new identity as children of God and a whole new family, the Church. Many young people are now unable to visit elderly parents for risk of exposing them. We must now sit with our broken hearts and "be okay" with just being children of God, trusting that He will care for our loved ones.

"I feel uneasy without my purchase power": We find great solace in being consumers, providing for ourselves, even things we don't particularly need. We like to comfort ourselves by exercising our purchase power. During this time, malls are closed and many of us have lost our jobs or have seen our income decrease. I sometimes find myself going online just to "window shop." Last week it kind of rattled me that many items were out of stock, even though I had no money to buy anything. Perhaps God wants us to sit with this desire to consume, trusting that we can depend on him.

"People without jobs are 'losers' or 'shameful'": In our society, self-sufficiency, the ability to provide for ourselves, has become a moral virtue that distinguishes the deserving from the undeserving. Those who cannot "do" for themselves are seen as morally deficient, lazy, undeserving of compassion or assistance. Many of us who have secretly held this attitude will now face the shame of losing our jobs. This is a good time to discover how God's ways of thinking are different from our own. In sitting with these feelings of shame and

Inside Out / A7

Respond to front-liners' urgent need for PPEs

THE front-liners in the hospitals are appealing for donations of medical supplies, especially PPEs or Personal Protective Equipment and Hazmat suits (similar to what astronauts wear). These are badly needed by doctors who treat the patients, anesthesiologists who intubate patients, nurses who take care of the patients, med techs who handle the specimen, radio technicians who do regular x-rays, medical aides who assist the medical team, housekeeping staff who handle discharges, cleaning and sanitation, and other allied health workers who have daily close encounter with COVID-19 patients.

With the enormous increase of COVID-19 positive, Pres. Duterte declared an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) of entire Luzon. There is strict home quarantine; suspended operation of public transportation; regulated provision for food and essential health services; and heightened presence of uniformed personnel.

As of March 29, there are 1,418 COVID-19 positive, 343 new cases, 42 recovered, 71 deaths, two of whom were two doctors, Dr. Francisco

Lukban, cardiologist at Capitol Medical Center, and Dr. Helen Tudtud, pathologist from Cebu City. They joined those who passed on earlier: Dr. Israel Bactol, cardiologist at Philippine Heart Center; Dr. Rose Pulido, oncologist at San Juan de Dios Hospital; Dr. Greg Macasaet III, anesthesiologist at Manila Doctors Hospital; Dr. Raul Lara, cardiologist at Philippine Heart Center; Dr. Henry Fernandez of Pangasinan Medical Society; Dr. Marcelo Jaochico of Pampanga Provincial Health Center; Dr. Raquel Seva, OB-Gyne in Laguna; Dr. Hector Alvarez of Novaliches District Hospital; Dr. Sally Gatchalian, pediatrician and President of the Philippine Pediatric Society, Inc. May your soul rest in peace. Thank you for offering your lives to save the lives of COVID-19 patients. Rest in peace and God bless! Almost 16% of death toll are doctors. They were contaminated either due to lack of PPEs or non-disclosure by the patient about their travel abroad.

Philippine Medical Association President Jose Santiago stated that the Philippines has many doctors but it lacks PPEs and other medical supplies - hazmat

suits, N95 masks, latex gloves and other medical supplies. They are needed to protect the front-liners from COVID-19. It is a MUST that they wear protective gear. NO PPE, NO DUTY, for the protection of both the front-liners and the patients, lest, they be contaminated and infected. Sending front-liners to COVID-19 ZONE without the proper PPEs and hazmat suit is like sending soldiers to war without weapons, a suicidal act.

For the millions of dollars/pesos-worth of donated PPEs, test kits and medical supplies, we thank Singapore, South Korea and China, local business companies like SM Group, Gokongwei Group, San Miguel, Ayala Group, Concepcion Industries, other businessmen and kind-hearted individuals who immediately responded to the appeal of front-liners from hospitals. Thank you for sharing your time, talent and treasure during this pandemic. Other service providers give them free or preferential services. Unlike what happened to a nurse who discriminated upon, beaten by 5 persons who threw clorox or bleach on his face which may damage

Duc in Altum

Atty. Aurora A. Santiago



his eyes.

The donated PPEs, test kits and medical supplies are now at the Bureau of Customs and DOH but both agencies have not yet released them to the hospitals. Health Sec. Francisco Duque III asks that all donated medical supplies be brought to DOH and requires hospitals to submit written letter request with the list of requested items. With this pandemic, red tape should be avoided, which Pres. Duterte himself stated. We suggest that hospital request be coursed through emails. Once received, DOH should immediately task the Philippine Army, which should be on stand-by at DOH, to immediately deliver the medical items to the hospitals. With the DOH bureaucratic requirement, we will continue to lose front-liners in the hospitals.

We appeal to future donors of PPEs and medical supplies, please give your donations directly to the hospitals, our front-liners urgently need those PPEs. Do not course them through DOH because of its red tape. Please do so for the sake of our front-liners and COVID-19 patients. We already lost 11

Duc in Altum / A7

The Catholic Church and the origin of hospitals



Faith and Culture

Cristina A. Montes

IN my last column, I promised to write in future columns about the good Spanish friars in Philippine history whose real-life legacies have been obscured by the fictional evil Spanish friars in Jose Rizal's novels. Since today's trending topic is the Covid-19 pandemic, I thought of featuring the Spanish friars who established the first hospitals in the Philippines.

But they played merely a fraction of the role the Catholic Church, in general, played in the origins of hospitals worldwide.

While the history of medicine dates back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, historians debate whether they had institutions resembling modern hospitals. It is certain, though, that in Ancient Rome, the early Christians attracted attention for their care of the sick during plagues. Saints like Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Cyprian, Saint Basil the Great, and Saint Ephrem established hospitals and cared for the sick. The first public hospital in Rome was founded by a pious woman

named Fabiola, who searched the streets for the poor ill people who needed care.

The Knights of Saint John, a military religious order during the Crusades, are also known as "the Hospitallers" because they pioneered the modern hospital. What they originally established as a hospice for pilgrims to Jerusalem evolved into a hospital that admitted Muslim and Jewish patients as well as Christians. It was hygienic by medieval standards and had organized operations: physicians visited the patients twice a day, patients had two main daily meals and daily baths, while other staff performed chores like laundry. Surgeries were performed. By the thirteenth century, the Hospitallers operated around twenty hospices and leper houses.

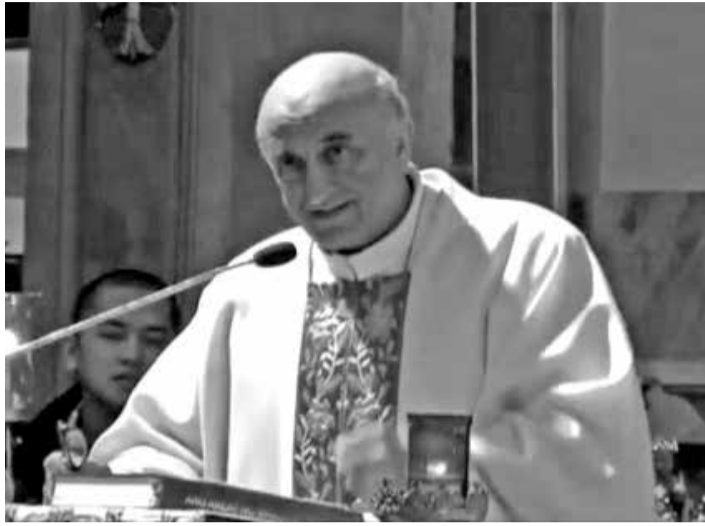
In the Philippines, names of friars and religious orders abound in the history of medicine. In the sixteenth century, the Hospital Real, a royal hospital, was administered by the Order of St. Francis and the Confraternity of La Misericordia, because King Philip II

believed that members of the clergy could better manage it. A lay Franciscan brother, Fray Juan Clemente, treated the sick beggars who flocked to the gates of the convent. When the chapel where he housed them could not accommodate them anymore, he sought help from the community and the clergy and raised funds for a hospital which became known as the Hospital de Naturales, the predecessor of today's Hospital de San Lazaro. The Hospitaller Order of San Juan de Dios established the Hospital de San Juan de Dios in 1643, which exists up to the present day.

And so on, and so forth. The modern hospital is one of the Catholic Church's gifts to the world and to the Philippines. If not for the self-sacrificing men and women of God who dedicated themselves to carrying out Christ's command of charity, we would have no hospitals.

(Note: Sources for this article are How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization by Thomas Woods, Jr. and A Legacy of Public Health: The Department of Health Story edited by Charity Tan.)

Italian priest who died to Covid-19 was 'father' to OFWs



Fr. Giancarlo Quadri. SCREENSHOT/STO. NIÑO MILAN YOUTUBE ACCOUNT

ONE of the Italian priests who died of coronavirus was a "father" to the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Italy, a Catholic bishop said.

Bishop Ruperto Santos expressed sympathy over the death of Fr. Giancarlo Quadri, 75, who was instrumental in the establishment of Filipino chaplaincies in northern Italy.

"It is with deep sorrow and great loss when I learned of the passing of Don Giancarlo Quadri because of Covid-19," Santos said.

The prelate met Quadri when he was still in Rome as rector of Pontificio Collegio Filipino (PCF) and, at the same time, national coordinator for the pastoral care of Filipino migrants in Italy.

Quadri was the head the pastoral care of migrants in the Archdiocese of Milan, the second-largest city in Italy.

"Together, we have established Filipino chaplaincies in Milan, then in Como and Bergamo," Santos said.

"He was a friend and a father to our overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), working hard spiritually and economically for us," the

prelate said.

Quadri dedicated his priesthood helping migrants with different religions and cultures.

The bishop also mourned Italian Fr. Giuseppe Berardelli, who sacrificed his life to save a younger coronavirus patient

Berardelli, 72, made headlines after he gave up a respirator that parishioners had bought for him for the sake of a young person who he did not know.

Santos, who chairs the bishops' Commission on PCF, said that what Berardelli did was "a powerful lesson of supreme act of sacrifice".

"We have asked our OFW's and chaplains to remember him together with the 66 priests who perished, with God's mercy and love, granting them eternal rest," he added.

Italian officials said 712 people died of the illness in the last 24 hours, pushing the death toll to 8,215, while new infections to 80,689.

"Learning what is happening in Italy, let us not forget our OFWs and their loved ones here. We pray for them and help their families," Santos said. **(CBCP News)**

Nun / A1

Priory said in a Facebook post.

"Please pray for her and for her community in India and for the whole congregation during this difficult time," the post reads.

Sr. Balagot, who is originally from Aringay, La Union, died at the age of 71. She has been a missionary in India since 2016.

The congregation also said that their sisters in Korea are on the frontlines in their

hospitals and clinics as well as those in the Philippines, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Namibia, Brazil and India.

Spain ranks second to Italy for the number of Covid-19 patient deaths worldwide and is third for the number of cases.

As of April 2, the death toll in Spain has jumped to 9,387, while the number of confirmed cases also went up to around 104,118. **(CBCP News)**

Pandemic / A1

"Indeed, on the day on which we celebrate the redeeming passion and death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, who like a slain lamb has taken upon himself the suffering and sin of the world, the Church raises her voice in prayer to God the Father Almighty for all humanity, and in particular for those who suffer most, while she awaits in faith the joy of the resurrection of her Spouse.

"Therefore this Congregation, in virtue of the faculties granted to it by the Supreme Pontiff Francis, availing itself of a possibility granted in the Roman Missal to the diocesan bishop in a situation of grave public need, proposes an intention to be added to the Solemn Intercessions of the above mentioned celebration, so that the prayers of those who invoke him in their tribulation might reach God the Father and so that, even in their adversity, all can experience the joy of his mercy."

The liturgy congregation also proposed that priests celebrate a votive Mass "specifically to implore God

to end this pandemic."

The New Liturgical Movement reported that an accompanying decree permitted the votive Mass to be celebrated daily, except on solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent and Eastertide, Holy Week and the Octave of Easter, Ash Wednesday and All Souls' Day.

A votive Mass is a Mass differing from the one prescribed for the day and celebrated for a special intention.

According to an unofficial translation on the Vatican News website, the Opening Prayer, or Collect, reads: "Almighty and eternal God, provident refuge in every danger, kindly turn your gaze toward us, who with faith implore you in tribulation, and grant eternal rest to the deceased, comfort to those who weep, health to the sick, peace to those who are dying, strength to healthcare providers, a spirit of wisdom to civil authorities, and a heart to draw near to everyone with love so that together we might glorify your holy name." **(CNA)**

Cardinal Tagle: 'Physical distancing' should not stop 'community caring'



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and president of Caritas Internationalis, celebrates Mass at the Pontificio Collegio in Rome Feb. 27, 2020, the anniversary of his priestly ordination. The cardinal is living at the college, with priests from the Philippines, other parts of Asia and Africa during Rome's coronavirus lockdown. COURTESY OF FR. ALFONSO ALOJIPAN/CNS

AS he echoed the call for "physical distancing" to slow the spread of coronavirus, a Vatican official said the practice should not eliminate "community caring".

Speaking during Mass for the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle said that the pandemic calls for

compassion.

"I know we need physical distancing and that is needed and we are appealing to everyone to observe it where possible," Tagle said in his homily at the Pontificio Collegio Filipino in Rome.

"But the feast of today reminds us that physical distancing should not lead

to forgetfulness of neighbor," he said.

The cardinal, who heads the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, stressed that physical distancing is for the "common good" and the response "should be common for all".

"And that is what is needed today. This is a pandemic and

this crisis affects all people and so we should think of all and the response should be for the common good," he added.

"As we observe physical distancing, let us not forget the communal caring. That's what Jesus did, God with us," Tagle also said. **(CBCP News)**

Archbishop pays tribute to healthcare workers: 'You are the face of Jesus to us'

A CHURCH official has paid tribute to the country's health workers amid the coronavirus pandemic, saying that they are "the face of Jesus" to all the sick.

Archbishop Socrates of Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan has taken to social media on March 26 to post a tribute to healthcare workers in the midst of the crisis.

In a video message, he said: "To all those caring for the sick, you become the face of Jesus to them. Jesus in the sick and Jesus in you, you meet together caring for each other."

At one point of his video, the archbishop was seen holding back his tears as he recalled Pope John Paul II's encounter with the lepers during his visit to Manila in 1981.

The pope, the archbishop said, wanted

to see the lepers at the Tala Leprosarium but was not allowed.

Instead, he said that the lepers were brought to an auditorium of Radio Veritas in Fairview, Quezon City where the pope had an activity.

"After the program, when the pope saw the lepers at the backstage, he knelt down and kissed the first leper and whispered to him, 'My Lord, my Lord!'" recalled Villegas.

As frontliners in the fight against coronavirus, the archbishop said that healthcare professionals and other hospital workers are also "taking care of Jesus".

"And we can never pay the love and service that you have given us," Villegas said.

"There are many reasons to be afraid

but there are also many reasons to be joyful because you are serving God. And you are Jesus to us all," he said.

Nine doctors have died due to the coronavirus in the Philippines, as hospitals were overwhelmed with more patients that they can feasibly treat.

Healthcare workers in hospitals have also been voicing frustration and fear over the lack protection on the frontlines of the fight against the deadly virus.

As of April 2, the Philippine Medical Association (PMA) said that 17 doctors have already died in the frontline battling the highly-infectious disease.

However, the PMA believes that the deaths could have been forestalled if there is enough supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for the health workers. **(CBCP News)**

Mass Testing / A1

successes of Singapore and South Korea," he said.

The Scientists Unite Against COVID, an alliance of more than 1,000 biologists and health experts, has earlier echoed the call of the World Health Organization for countries to "test, test, test".

"Each day we delay, more cases go undetected, and more people may die," the scientists said.

Also composed of 336 organizations, the group led by several University of the Philippines molecular biologists also launched a petition calling on the government to start mass testing.

They emphasized that mass testing would give the government a clearer picture of the extent of the infections in the country and respond accordingly.

They added that by decentralizing testing from major hospitals to laboratories, the Philippines would be able to spot and contain localized outbreaks

Poor / A1

The archdiocese has been stepping up to make all its facilities available to medical frontliners including providing transportation services for them.

But the need is rising, the prelate, stressing that not only doctors and nurses are in need of lodging but also hospital maintenance people and orderlies.

He tapped religious congregations to assist in ministering to the needs of those who are at risk and those who are involved in responding to the pandemic.

The initiative have also been adopted in other dioceses, opening their facilities

such as pastoral centers and retreat houses to healthcare frontliners and street dwellers.

Caritas Manila has also distributed nearly 140 million worth of gift checks to about 139,000 families as of April 1, aside from its distribution of "Covid-19 safety kits" and food bags to the city's low-income families.

In Cebu, the archdiocese has turned its biggest building as Covid-19 care center to serve mildly to moderately symptomatic patients.

The IEC Convention Center Cebu (IC3), formerly known as the IEC Pavillon, will be among the two "first

"We believe that the country has not reached the peak of this virus crisis, and we fear that the number of infected patients could swell in the next several weeks," Alminaza added.

"We therefore request our government to take all the necessary preparations, including utilizing and empowering our LGU Health Departments," he also said. **(CBCP News)**



Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos. FILE PHOTO

Bishop alarmed over handling of Covid-19 cases in Albay

LEGAZPI, Albay— A Catholic bishop sought the national government's action over the "alarming and disheartening" way of handling coronavirus cases in Albay province.

Echoing the sentiments of many people, Bishop Joel Baylon of Legazpi lamented that at least three Covid-19 patients were placed under home quarantine instead of being in strict isolation.

Information reaching the diocese also revealed that the patients were left to the care of barangay health workers "who do not have the proper training" in handling the disease.

"For the sake of decency and human respect, and in the name of our God who suffered for us all, and continues to suffer of our inabilities, selfishness and greed, please do something about this dire situation," Baylon said in a statement issued on March 30.

The bishop stressed that



Bishop Joel Baylon of Legazpi. PHOTO FROM DIOCESE

proper isolation, "logic demands", means in a facility separated and far away from any vulnerable community such as a barangay.

He underscored that declaring a barangay even

under a strict lockdown will never protect the community from the virus for "as long as a person infected with it is in their midst and not properly isolated".

"Will we wait until the entire province of Albay is infected with the virus before the national government acts through the Department of Health?" Baylon said. (CBCPNews)

In Sorsogon, Church helps feed the needy with fish

SORSOGON City— A small project staged in the Sorsogon diocese has been quietly contributing to the needy in recent days.

As the Luzon-wide lockdown affected mostly the poor, Caritas Sorsogon is helping feed the needy in different parishes with fish, along with a pack of rice and some canned goods.

"This is our smallest way of kindness in alleviating the needs of the poor parishioners who don't have food on their table because of the present crisis,"

it said on March 21.

The project is part of its "kindness station" for poor communities that will be affected by the month-long lockdown in the diocese.

Caritas Philippines, the Church's social action arm, has earlier encouraged dioceses to adopt community-based emergency assistance project to decentralize the response.

Fr. Edwin Gariguez, executive secretary of Caritas Philippines, said that it could also help mobilize communities

to share and care, particularly to the poor.

In Iligan diocese, the Duyog Marawi in partnership with the Redemptorists also activated their own "kindness center" and have prepositioned rice packs for starters.

"It's a small start, but we hope to make kindness a contagious virus so that you too can contribute to make our poor families survive this crisis," said Rey Barnes, Duyog Marawi executive director. (CBCPNews)

Cebu archdiocese turns IEC center into Covid-19 care facility



The International Eucharistic Congress Pavilion during the 51st IEC held in Cebu City in January 2016. FILE PHOTO

CEBU City— The Archdiocese of Cebu has opened its International Eucharistic Congress (IEC) center, a facility with a floor area of about 25,754 square meters, for people showing symptoms of coronavirus.

The IEC Convention Center Cebu (IC3), formerly known as the IEC Pavillon, will be among the two "first response areas" set up to serve as Covid-19 care and quarantine facilities.

The other FRA is the Sacred Heart School — Ateneo de Cebu, formerly known as SHS School for Boys.

The initiative was part of a concerted effort called "Bayanihan Cebu Center" (BCC) to serve mildly to moderately symptomatic patients.

The IC3 was the venue of the 51st IEC that brought in over 10,000 participants from all over the world in 2016.

"Now, its doors are to be opened in collaboration with

the kindness and generosity of some people in Cebu, to become a haven of hope and healing," Caritas Cebu said on March 31.

"The venue that used to hold the teachings on the Eucharist will now become a place of concretizing that bread being broken and shared to those in need in time of this Covid-19 pandemic," it added.

The San Carlos Seminary will also serve as BCC's "drop-off area" for medical supplies and equipment which will be needed by the two centers.

The archdiocese has earlier launched an initiative aimed at providing assistance to frontline workers and relief for the poor communities.

Through its "Archbishop Teofilo Camomot Buhat sa Kalu-oy Program", the archdiocese aims to provide the basic needs to poor families who are at a disadvantage due to the pandemic. (CBCPNews)

Duc in Altum / A5

doctors. It is a matter of life and death both of the medical teams and the patients. Time is of the essence. We are already losing many medical experts—cardiologists, anesthesiologists, internists. What if we lose all of them?

I do not want to let this pass. I was so shocked to learn that our government hospitals procured substandard PPEs; the front-liners I talked to said "ok na po ang substandard PPEs kayasa wala" (Substandard PPEs are ok, rather than no PPEs at all), another corrupt practice discovered; but we will discuss this in normal times, when this pandemic is over.

The Church never stops giving aids even during lockdown. Many dioceses distribute rice and groceries

to those badly affected by ECQ, like tricycle and jeepney drivers, construction workers and those under No Work, No Pay job. The Diocese of Kalookan distributed rice and groceries to the parishes to be given to parishioners in need. Voucher from Caritas Manila and Caritas Kalookan are also distributed to those in the peripheries of society. Feeding continues.

Online Masses and Lenten Recollections can be viewed through the effort of Social Communications Ministry of every parish. Some parishes brought out the Blessed Sacrament and blessed every houses and buildings along the way.

Our hospitals are full, they can no longer accommodate patients. The best is stay at

home. In so doing, we do not only help contain COVID-19 but we also help our front-liners who are already exhausted and dwindling. After the incubation period of 14 to 21 days, symptoms begin to manifest and infestation prevalent, a dangerous period. It is now Day 14 from the time quarantine started. Do not go out or you risk your life and that of the elderly in your family. Our God is so merciful. Let us pray for the immediate eradication of Covid-19 and for the scientists and experts to discover antidotes, medicines and vaccines. Let us pray that the front-liners be shielded from COVID-19 and for the patients to be cured. Let us pray for courage of the families of the front-liners, patients and those who died. Eternal rest be granted unto

those who died fighting the unseen enemy. God bless us all!

Let us not be another totally irresponsible Sen. Koko Pimentel, a PUI or person under investigation, who arrogantly roamed around, contaminated every person he met including the medical personnel in a hospital, violated the law that he passed as a legislator, knowing that the penalty is imprisonment and fine and as public official, he can be disqualified from office. A person who violates curfew hours are arrested, detained and fined. The law must be enforced equally, irrespective of status in life. He must face the full force of the law. Nobody is above the law. Dura lex, sed lex. The law is hard, but that is the law.

And That's The Truth / A4

from your family in case COVID claims you suddenly.

Be Humble: Especially when praying, humility is the best stance. In late February a "prayer" went around in social media asking to be forwarded. "At 9:00pm TONIGHT...everyone is asked to please join for THREE MINUTES to pray for transformation of the Corona virus situation in the world. Visualize and ask for healing anointing and energy like rain to fall and soak every inch of land in the world. All flu virus, coronavirus and pneumonia-like illness supernaturally die out by itself, evaporated and extinguished from the world. No more report of new cases—visualize the feeling of relief and smiles amongst the medical people and the public to shout out with victory on their faces, saying thank You God for Your love, grace and mercy that everything will begin to be back to normal." I received that "prayer" from Christians and devout Catholics; what a shame. Not to put down visualization techniques, per se, but this "prayer" is simply presumptuous and takes too much for granted. "Back to normal"? Greed among world powers? Ignorance among the poor? Complacency of the elite? Indifference of the middle class? Prayer is not magic. Be humble! Prayer is standing naked before God, acknowledging our nothingness, humbly obeying His word and disposing

ourselves to embrace His will. It is not "I will focus on a vision and you will give me the perfect world I want, God, thank you."

Be Introspective: Isn't it ironic that the quarantine period for our country began in Lent? "Quarantine" comes from the Latin "quadraginta" and the Italian "quaranta", both meaning "40". Lent commemorates Christ's 40 days in the wilderness, and is a period supposedly devoted to fasting, abstinence, and penitence. Paging forgetful Christians! How lucky can you be, followers of Christ? That even in a raging pandemic, you are helped? Lent asks that you stay away from parties and overeating, late nights and a lot of smooching, the very things COVID is warning us against. Imagine your disappointment if the quarantine fell on the season you call Christmas! Lent to a growing number of you has been reduced to local tourism, holidays out of town during the Holy Week, my eye! Perhaps COVID's quarantine is heaven sent after all. As a recent poster says, "If you can't go outside, go inside." Be introspective. Go into your thoughts, your fears. Reflect on your core values. Examine your world view. In all probability, before COVID, your world never went farther than your horizon cemented by your desires, your possessions, your loved ones, your dreams, your plans, your prayers for your comfort and

safety. Is that world all that you were born to love?

Be Truthful: Now you see the deadly corona is no respecter of persons. Prince and pauper are equal in COVID's eyes. Age, race, social standing, these things matter not to a killer virus. Even healers cannot heal themselves by simply willing it. You realize the pandemic could take you or anyone else anytime, but how ready are you? Be truthful. Behind your bravest words, you are afraid. You are not ready, but truth stares you in the face that your life is not in your hands. Your life was given to you as a gift; how did you live it? Who was in control? Did you thank the Giver and give glory to Him by living it His way? Instead of obsessing yourself with staying alive, now, in Lent, aspire to hand over the reins of your life to the Creator. Count the many times you've said "Why are people hurting me when I've done nothing wrong?" Stop lying to yourself. Admit that you need forgiveness, and to forgive as well. For once, accept the truth that without God, you are nothing. Your trophies, your honorifics and the titles tailing your name, your victories, your amorous conquests, your Facebook friends—none of these can add a minute to your life when your time has come. The truth is, all that is yours to control now is the turn you want your life to take should you survive the pandemic. Meanwhile, you can't die from being kind and learning to love as God loves.

Candidly Speaking / A4

and dish-washing, doing laundry, house-cleaning, etc., we should just be game enough to go through them.

What matters is that we relate them to God. These tasks have the same or even more potential sanctifying value than our usual serious and more difficult jobs during our normal days. What matters is that we put love for God in doing them. And since they are

relatively easier tasks to undertake, then we have a golden opportunity of attaining some degree of sanctity in an easier way.

But more importantly, these extraordinary conditions we are having now are a good opportunity to really deepen our prayer life and everything in our spiritual life which, in the end, is what would endure for all eternity.

We cannot deny that because of the usual frenetic lifestyle these days—some of us would even describe it as having a fast and furious

lifestyle—we most likely give our spiritual life a very shallow attention and care, if at all.

Now is the time to polish our skill at mental and contemplative prayer, at developing an abiding and practical spirit of sacrifice, at polishing our knowledge of the doctrine of our faith, and at achieving a stronger unity of life, where there is more coherence between our faith and our life, between our good intentions and our deeds, between the theories and principles we profess and their practice, etc.

With respect to our life of prayer, we should learn how to really be focused in our conversation with God, knowing how to avoid distractions and how to equip ourselves adequately so that our prayer becomes meaningful and substantial.

There are many good things that can be done during these extraordinary days, many golden opportunities that can be taken advantage of.

Inside Out / A5

being undeserving, we can discover that God does not measure our worth by worldly standards. He loves our weakness and dependence on him, no matter how society looks at us.

"I'm afraid there won't be enough for me": In these past weeks, many of us have panicked out of fear that we don't have enough for ourselves. We have stockpiled and hoarded to ensure we have enough, emptying the shelves of essential items. In some supermarkets there have been fights over toilet paper. Often those who are weaker are less likely to be able to fend for themselves. When we sit with ourselves in silence, God can minister to our fears and assure us that he is the Good Shepherd who will tend to his flock. We can relax because even when we have nothing, there is enough to go around.

"God will not forgive me for not being in church": Some of us are struggling most with not having access to

churches or the mass. We can't escape the feeling that we cannot please God without our physical presence in the church at mass or in our devotions. Underneath our good intentions there are sometimes wounds that God wants to heal. One wound that many of us carry is the tendency to try to justify ourselves before God—to do things "for" God so that we can feel worthy of his love. Perhaps God wants us to sit with our feeling of guilt so that he can show us how generous he really is. The truth is that we cannot do anything for God. Rather, he wants to do something for us. He is the giver. Maybe this is a time for us to sit and receive.

Let us enter into this silence together as one flock, discovering how broken and needy we are, and how good our Shepherd is. In this silence let us hold in our hearts our broken and needy world, especially the sick and dying.

Church marks special day of prayer for Covid-19 medical frontliners

THE Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines led a "Day of Prayer" for the medical frontliners against coronavirus, as 12 doctors have died from the disease.

Parish churches across the country offered their Masses on March 29 for the protection of health workers battling the virus.

In a circular issued March 27, Archbishop Romulo Valles, CBCP President, invited all the dioceses to offer prayers for the country's health workers on the fifth Sunday of Lent.

"We do this in all our Masses, our Rosaries, during our Holy Hour, and in our moments of personal prayer," he said.

Valles said it's up to each diocese and its parishes to concretize the general call to prayer in their liturgies and pastoral activities.

He said this may be

articulated in our introduction to the masses, homilies, prayers of the faithful, and intentions in our rosaries and holy hour.

"Of course we continue praying our Oratio Imperata," Valles added.

He said that among the support to healthcare workers the Church can offer is reminding the people to "cooperate" with the quarantine measures imposed by the government.

Valles also asked the dioceses to open their facilities as temporary shelters for hospital workers who are hesitant to go home for fear of transmitting the virus to their families.

The CBCP head was acting on reports that some medical workers have been shunned by their landlords for the risk that come with their job.

"May our prayer move us to action," he said. (CBCPNews)



Camillian missionaries hold a medical mission for the street dwellers who are housed at the Dela Salle University in Manila March 31. PHOTO FROM THE CAMILLIANS

Pope names new auxiliary bishop of Zamboanga



Auxiliary bishop-elect Moises Cuevas of Zamboanga. PASTOR BONUS SEMINARY

POPE Francis has appointed Fr. Moises Cuevas as auxiliary bishop of Zamboanga.

In his new role, the 46-year-old bishop-elect will assist the current Archbishop of Zamboanga, Archbishop Romulo Dela Cruz.

The appointment was made public in Rome on March 19, at 12 noon in Rome (7:00 p.m. local time).

Upon his appointment, Cuevas has been serving as the parish priest of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Zamboanga City.

Born in Batangas City, the new bishop too his philosophy studies at the Pastor Bonus Seminary in Zamboanga City and theology at the Regional Major Seminary in Davao City.

He was ordained a priest for the Zamboanga archdiocese on Dec. 6, 2000.

He then carried out the following ministries:

- Parish vicar of the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of Zamboanga (2001-2003)
- Rector of the sanctuary Nostra Signora del Pilar (2003-2009)
- Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Zamboanga (2003-2009)
- Administrator of the Pastoral Center (2005-2007)
- Parish priest of the parish of Santa Maria (2009-2015)

Since 2017, Cuevas has also been serving as director of the archdiocese's Commission on the Clergy. (CBCPNews)

On Palm Sunday, priests urged to bless in the streets

ON Palm Sunday, priests can go around the streets to bless the palms carried by the faithful who wait in their homes, the Catholic hierarchy said.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) published guidelines on March 21 for bishops and priests on the celebration of the Holy Week during the coronavirus pandemic.

In a circular, the CBCP stated that the faithful who will be following the celebration online or on TV may hold their palm branches while the priest passes along and recites the prayer of blessing of palms.

"In this case, those who follow the celebration on TV, there is no need for Holy Water to bless the Palm branches," the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines said.

After the Mass, the CBCP

recommended that priests can go around the streets of the parish to bless the palms of the faithful who wait in front of their homes, "without using holy water".

The CBCP warned that the blessing with holy water "might cause commotion".

"The priest makes the sign of the cross as he passes through the streets," part of the circular reads, as "the Lector reads the Passion Narrative along the way".

The CBCP also suggested to parishes to use sound system to make people aware that the priest is passing by.

"All of these must be done with only two to three ministers to accompany the priests. This is to avoid gathering of people," the CBCP suggested.

This year's Palm Sunday falls on April 5, which is a commemoration of Jesus Christ's humble and triumphant entry to



A priest blesses the palms with holy water at the start of Palm Sunday Mass at the Ina ng Awa Parish, New Bilibid Prison Reservation, Muntinlupa City, March 23, 2018. JOHANN MANGUSSAD

Jerusalem, only to be crucified later by the very people who welcomed him.

Popular traditions include processions with palm branches and the blessing of palms.

Several bishops across the country have already suspended public Masses and other religious activities.

Archbishop Romulo Valles,

CBCP President, stressed that "social distancing" is a "necessity" in this time of pandemic to stem the transmission of the virus.

He said that the CBCP guidelines aims "to keep a balance" of the centrality of the Paschal Triduum and the demands of the measure to prevent the spread of the disease. (CBCPNews)

Duterte declares Nat'l Week of Prayer against COVID-19 crisis

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has declared a "national week of prayer" as the country battles the coronavirus crisis.

After declaring a nationwide state of calamity, he urged Filipinos to turn to God in prayer in this time of "affliction".

In his Proclamation no. 934, Duterte announced that moments of prayer would be taking place on the fourth week of March.

He particularly asked Filipinos of all faith to pray for those

afflicted with COVID-19, and for the frontliners in the fight against pandemic.

Bishop Ruperto Santos of Balanga has welcomed the initiative, saying that "we have to pray unceasingly and return to Him all the praise and glory which are rightly His".

"We should not only pray but much more honor God. God should never be mocked nor make fun of. All of us should always respect God, and one's religion," he said. (CBCPNews)



President Rodrigo Duterte. MALACAÑANG PHOTO

Cardinal Tagle, in new position, looks for lessons learned in lockdown

VATICAN— Starting a new job always involves a learning curve, but Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle got much more than he bargained for when he moved to Rome in February to begin his duties as prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Not only did he have a new position after being the archbishop of Manila for almost nine years, his first month coincided with the start of Italy's lockdown and global travel restrictions because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Cardinal Tagle is living the lockdown — and working mostly from home — at Rome's Pontifical Filipino College where, he said, "I feel safe and supported by a community of Filipino, Asian and African young priests studying in Rome. I hope my presence among them also makes the CEP (Congregation for the Evangelization of

Peoples) close to them, since their countries and dioceses are served by this dicastery."

The cardinal concelebrates Mass each morning with the resident priests and, each Sunday, he serves as the principal celebrant and homilist for a Mass livestreamed on Facebook and followed by thousands of Filipinos around the world.

"Coming to Rome for a universal mission at a time when the lockdown occurs — I am still in awe at the surprises of God," the cardinal said April 1 in an email response to questions. "I bring this paradox to reflection and prayer," he said. "The situation is reeducating me about the dynamic tension between the local and the universal."

Global reaction to the pandemic has shown "opportunities for worldwide collaboration but also threats to solidarity," he said.

And, as the chief-in-charge

of the Vatican's office for evangelization, he said he is seeing great potential for sharing the Gospel in what Catholics, their priests, parishes and bishops are doing with social media in the absence of in-person Masses and meetings.

With local parish activities on hold, "I am fascinated with the renewed appreciation of the role of families, schools and small communities in evangelization," the cardinal said. "Liturgy, ordained ministry and popular religiosity are also being reimagined but with a more missionary thrust."

He and the congregation staff have taken note, he said.

Cardinal Tagle's work-from-home regime applies not only to his new role as congregation prefect, but also to his continuing service as president of Caritas Internationalis, the Vatican-based umbrella organization for national Catholic charities

around the world.

How doing both at the same time works out is something he said will be evaluated as time goes on, but "most of the countries served by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples are the same countries where Caritas has a vibrant missionary presence."

"We should not forget that in many parts of the world, especially among non-Christian communities, the humanitarian service of charity done by Caritas is often the first encounter of people with the person of Jesus, the Gospel and the church," he said. "Evangelization and charity come together."

And while it is necessary and good to focus on the pandemic right now, he said, at the same time "we should reflect and pray over the experience to find its meaning for us now and in the future."

A few of the things he said he's reflected on include:

The fact that with such a huge interruption of the global economy, "new forms of poverty will emerge. We should prepare now to assist the new poor in order to avoid forms of exploitation and violence. The outpouring of compassion that we have seen so far needs to be encouraged into the post-pandemic future."

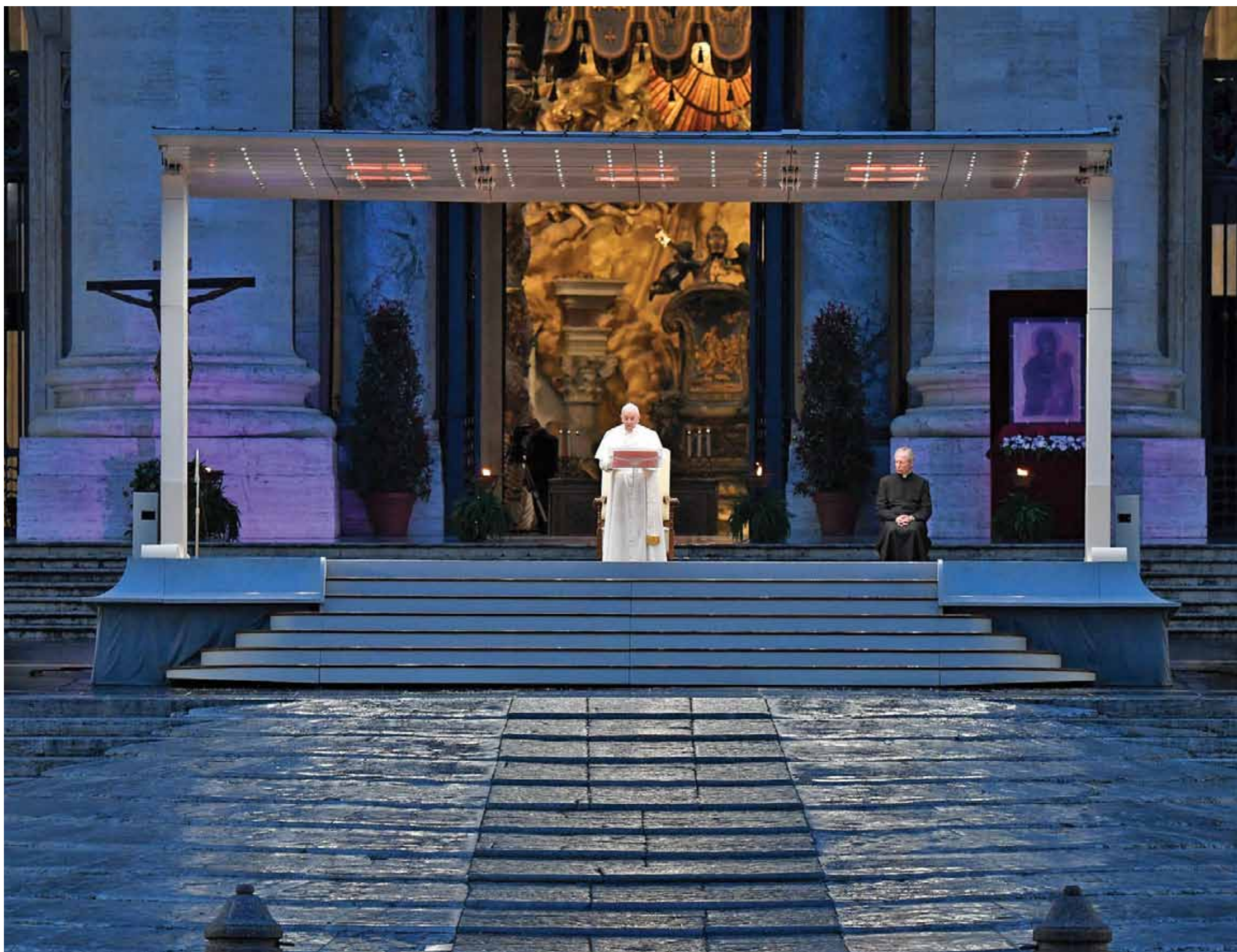
"We have experienced powerful forms of connectivity through the internet. School instruction, conferences, board meetings, scientific exchange, emotional first aid, humor, artistic renditions, prayer etc. have been sustained by new and creative forms of human connectivity. We can continue reaping and developing their humanizing fruits for the common good."

"We might get used to physical distancing and lose the social or humanitarian

reason for it. We should be cautious that the lockdown, quarantine and distancing not develop into a culture of isolation, indifference and prejudice."

"Ironically," measures to contain the coronavirus have "made the air purer, the skies bluer, our hands cleaner, our streets and homes 'safer.' A deadly virus has made us behave more responsibly toward ourselves, family, community and creation. I hope when the virus is gone, our good habits would continue."

With the churches closed, many people are realizing just how important faith and prayer are in their lives. "A virus mirrored to us our fragility, limitations and insufficiency. This is quite humiliating for a people gone mad with pride and self-adulation. But the memory of the virus must be kept alive to keep us humble and hopeful." (Cindy Wooden)



Pope Francis leads a prayer service in an empty St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 27, 2020. At the conclusion of the service the pope held the Eucharist as he gave an extraordinary blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world). The service was livestreamed in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. CNS/VATICAN MEDIA

'Faith begins when we realize we are in need of salvation'

Extraordinary moment of prayer and "Urbi et Orbi" Blessing presided over by Pope Francis
Sagrato of St. Peter's Basilica
27 March 2020

"WHEN evening had come" (Mk 4:35). The Gospel passage we have just heard begins like this. For weeks now it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice in people's gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us. Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice, saying "We are perishing" (v. 38), so we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.

It is easy to recognize ourselves in this story. What is harder to understand is Jesus' attitude. While his disciples are quite naturally alarmed and desperate, he stands in the stern, in the part of the boat that sinks first. And what does he do? In spite of the tempest, he sleeps on soundly, trusting in the Father; this is the only time in the Gospels we see Jesus sleeping. When he wakes up, after calming the wind and the waters, he turns to the disciples in a reproaching voice: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (v. 40).

Let us try to understand. In what does the lack of the disciples' faith consist, as contrasted with Jesus' trust? They had not stopped believing in him; in fact, they called on him. But we see how they call on him: "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (v. 38). *Do you not*

care: they think that Jesus is not interested in them, does not care about them. One of the things that hurts us and our families most when we hear it said is: "Do you not care about me?" It is a phrase that wounds and unleashes storms in our hearts. It would have shaken Jesus too. Because he, more than anyone, cares about us. Indeed, once they have called on him, he saves his disciples from their discouragement.

The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people's souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly "save" us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity.

In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Lord, your word this evening strikes us and regards us, all of us. In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not

shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: "Wake up, Lord!"

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith. Which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you. This Lent your call reverberates urgently: "Be converted!", "Return to me with all your heart" (Joel 2:12). You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a *time of choosing*. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others. We can look to so many exemplary companions for the journey, who, even though fearful, have reacted by giving their lives. This is the force of the Spirit poured out and fashioned in courageous and generous self-denial. It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people—often forgotten people—who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, religious men and women and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves. In the face of so much suffering, where the authentic development of our peoples is assessed, we experience

the priestly prayer of Jesus: "That they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). How many people every day are exercising patience and offering hope, taking care to sow not panic but a shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday gestures, how to face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze and fostering prayer. How many are praying, offering and interceding for the good of all. Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Faith begins when we realize we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we founder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.

The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering. The Lord awakens so as to reawaken and revive our Easter faith. We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love. In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again

listen to the proclamation that saves us: he is risen and is living by our side. The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame (cf. Is 42:3) that never falters, and let us allow hope to be rekindled.

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).

General absolution in the COVID-19 pandemic no change in the Canonical Norm

By Jaime B. Achacoso, JCD

I READ the recent Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the current pandemic, dated 20.III.2020, which seems to relax the provisions for the administration of the Sacrament of Penance—specifically granting the faculty to impart collective absolution without prior individual confession. Is this the right interpretation of this Note?

I have dealt with this matter repeatedly in the past, but it is good to briefly review the existing canonical norms. The aforementioned Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary (20.III.2020) in fact starts with this brief review. We can quote an older Response from the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts—with Prot. No. 5309/96 and dated 8.XI.1996—which, in terms of authority, takes precedence over this recent Note.

Individual and Integral Confession and Absolution is the Only Ordinary Way for Serious Sins to be forgiven

Can. 960 states: Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary way by which the faithful, who is aware of serious sin, is reconciled with God and with the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses the person from confession of this type, in which case reconciliation can take place in other ways.

Can.961, §1 states a general prohibition: Absolution cannot be imparted in a general manner to a number of penitents at once without previous individual confession, unless....

“The canon sanctions the obligation of individual confession, with the accompanying absolution, as the only ordinary way for obtaining reconciliation with God and with the Church. Such ordinary way is qualified as pertaining to Divine Law by the Council of Trent (cf. DS 1707).

“The duty sanctioned in c.960 is complemented and confirmed by the norm established in c.986, §1 that states: All to whom the care of souls is committed by reason of an office are obliged to provide

that the confessions of the faithful entrusted to their care be heard when they reasonably ask to be heard and that the opportunity be given to them to come to individual confession on days and hours set for their convenience. In fact, this is a fundamental right of the faithful and a serious duty of justice of the sacred pastors (cf. cc.213 and 843).”

General Absolution has an Exceptional Character with Stringent Conditions for the Exception

The Response pointed out that “John Paul II had expressly underscored this exceptional character: The reconciliation of several penitents through general confession and absolution, hold an exceptional nature and hence cannot be left to free choice, but should be regulated by norms instituted for this purpose (Apost. Exhort. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, AAS, LXXVII, 1985, p.267).” It then summarized the present norms as follows:

Can. 961, §1, nn.1°-2°, presenting the extraordinary way of collective absolution, taxatively establishes two conditions that indicate the only cases in which such absolution is licit:

1° danger of death threatens (**imminent periculum mortis**) and there is no time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents. (This is a reference to the original motive for the concession of general absolution in the conflictive period of the two World Wars).

2° there exists a grave necessity (**ad sit gravis necessitas**). The state of necessity, the canon explains, exists when the number of penitents and the scarcity of priests causes the faithful, through no fault of theirs, to be deprived for a notable length of time of the sacramental grace or of Holy Communion.

“In order for such serious necessity to exist, two elements must concur: first, a scarcity of priests and a great number of penitents; secondly, that the faithful do not have or have not had the possibility of confessing beforehand or



A confessional booth at the Manila Cathedral. FILE PHOTO

immediately afterwards. In practice, they should not be responsible, through negligence, of their actual loss of the state of grace or of the impossibility of receiving Holy Communion (sine propria culpa) and that such situation is expected to be prolonged.”

In other words, three conditions must actually concur: a scarcity of priests, a great number of penitents, and the faithful have not had nor have the possibility of confessing individually beforehand or immediately afterwards.

“Nevertheless, the gathering of a great number of faithful of itself does not justify collective absolution. For this reason, the same canonical norm specifies that: it is not considered a sufficient necessity if confessors cannot be readily available only because of the great number of penitents as can occur on the occasion of some great feast or pilgrimage.”

Only the Bishop can determine in a Concrete Case if a Grave Necessity exists: He must base

Himself on the Criteria set by the Episcopal Conference

The Response also assures that the exceptional nature of general absolution cannot be trivialized so as to become ordinary. Thus, it reminds everyone that “c.961, §2 establishes that it is up to the diocesan bishop to determine in a concrete case, in the light of criteria agreed upon with other members of the conference of bishops, if the conditions for imparting general absolution are verified. Therefore, the diocesan bishop, in concrete cases and in the light of the criteria fixed by the Episcopal Conference, has the role of verifying the presence or otherwise of the conditions established by the Code of Canon Law. He cannot establish the criteria and does not in any way have the power to modify, add to or remove from the conditions established in the Code and the criteria agreed upon with the other members of the Episcopal Conference.

In other words, other than the obvious situation of imminent danger of death, no priest, on his

own judgment, may decide on the existence of the three simultaneous conditions for a state of necessity that warrants general absolution without individual confession.

“The Supreme Legislator, in his pronouncements, has adverted many times the delicateness of this norm and has many times appealed to the responsibility of the Pastors of the dioceses as regards its observance.

“Already Paul VI (...) had said: Ordinaries are not authorized to change the required conditions, to substitute other conditions for those given, or to determine grave necessity according to their personal criteria, however worthy” (AAS, LXX, 1978, p.330).

“John Paul II had confirmed this serious duty: Therefore, it pertains to the Bishop alone, within the limits of his diocese, to determine whether the conditions really exist... he makes this judgment **graviter onerata conscientia** and with full observance of the law and praxis of the Church and taking

Absolution / B7

Chapter and verse of the readings: Some reasons why they aren't announced

Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy and sacramental theology and director of the Sacerdos Institute at the Regina Apostolorum university, answers the following query:

Q: Recently I have been asked to explain why the reader at Mass doesn't say the chapter and verses from where the reading is taken from, for a given reading during Mass. I have been trying to check through whatever document I can find for reference, but so far I have found none stating it as a rule or even just mentioning the practice. — C.M., Lusaka, Zambia

A: I would say that there are several reasons why announcing the chapter and verse does not generally form part of liturgical tradition, whether Catholic or Orthodox. As far as I can ascertain, Anglican services do include the announcement of chapter and verse before the readings.

The first reason, I would say, is that the liturgical rituals for proclaiming the readings were established long before the introduction of chapter and verse into the Bible. When preaching, the Church Fathers say, “As John says somewhere ...” or “As Ezekiel prophesies regarding the temple ...,” as numerical references did not exist.

The introduction of chapters to the Bible was made by Cardinal Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury (1150-1228). It was probably done while he was a professor at the University of Paris in the years 1204-1205, so as to bring some uniformity in teaching Scriptures to students who hailed from all over Europe. These chapters were later substantially adopted in the first printed versions of the Latin Vulgate.

Verses were introduced later, after the invention of the printing press. For the Old Testament, the division was based on a 1440 concordance of the Hebrew Bible prepared by



Pope Francis celebrates Mass in the chapel of his residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae, at the Vatican on Jan. 30, 2020. VATICAN MEDIA

Rabbi Isaac Nathan ben Kalonymus, which in turn was based on a much older system of division used for study and cantillation of the sacred text in the Jewish community. This concordance was first printed in 1523, and its system became standard.

Although he was not the first person to divide the New Testament into verses, the modern system was introduced by scholar and printer Robert Estienne (1503-1559) in his 1551 edition of the Greek New Testament, a French version in 1553 and the Latin Vulgate in 1555.

Since the cycle of readings and the introductory rituals already existed,

and until relatively recent times the readings were proclaimed in Latin, the division into chapter and verse was never incorporated into the liturgy.

A second reason is that the Roman Catholic Church often selects and abridges texts for liturgical proclamation in order to transmit a particular message adapted to the day while leaving out some verses. For example, on Sunday, February 23, 2020, the first reading was from Leviticus 19:1-2 and 17-18, the first verses introducing and contextualizing the second. This practice would make for rather awkward proclamations.

A third reason is that the liturgical

introductions are geared more toward fostering an attitude of attentive listening in the faithful than in imparting information. This is quite sober in the Roman rite even though the Gospel proclamation is prefaced with the greeting and response “The Lord be with you. — And with your spirit” underling that the communication comes from Christ. It is a living word that is experienced and not just a “reading” or text to be used as a starting point for preaching.

The Eastern liturgies tend to emphasize this reality much more strongly. For example, the widely used Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

introduces the Liturgy of the Word in the following manner:

“For the Epistle, the priest sings: Let us be attentive.

(The Reader reads the verses from the Psalms.)

The Deacon: ‘Wisdom.’

Reader: The reading is from (the name of the book of the New Testament from which the Apostolic reading is taken).

Deacon: Let us be attentive.

(The Reader reads the text)

Priest: Peace be with you.

People: Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Priest (in a low voice): Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of your Gospel. Instill in us, also, reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You, we give glory together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.”

The introductory rites for the Gospel proclamation follow:

“Priest: Wisdom. Arise. Let us hear the holy Gospel. Peace be with all.

People: And with your spirit.

Deacon: The reading is from the holy Gospel according to (Name). Let us be attentive.

People: Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You.

(The Deacon reads the designated Gospel.)

People: Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You.”

Recommendations for the Celebrations of the Holy Week During the Quarantine Period

Circular No. 20-15
March 20, 2020

TO ALL THE BISHOPS AND THE DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATORS

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies and Reverend Administrators,

RE: Recommendations for the Celebrations of the Holy Week During the Quarantine Period (2020)

“The greatest mysteries of the redemption are celebrated yearly by the Church beginning with the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday until Vespers of Easter Sunday. This time is called “the Triduum of the crucified, buried and risen”, it is also called the “Easter Triduum” because during it is celebrated the Paschal Mystery, that is, the passing of the Lord from this world to his Father. The church by the celebration of this mystery, through liturgical signs and sacramentals, is united to Christ her Spouse in intimate communion” (Paschales Solemnitatis no. 38).

The annual celebration of the Paschal Triduum is the apex and heart of the whole liturgical year. This is greatly manifested in the way we celebrate the Holy Week as Filipinos full of faith, life and color. All our parishes take time to prepare for these great celebrations. Filipinos abroad long to be back to the country during this time to experience the life and beauty of the mysteries we celebrate therein. Our national life is truly influenced by these great celebrations.

In this time of Intense Quarantine due to the spread of the COVID-19, almost everything and everyone is affected. Our social, economic and religious life are painfully hit by the “social distancing” that is a necessity this time of pandemic to stem the transmission of the virus.

It is in this context that we are offering all our dioceses these liturgico-pastoral recommendations to keep a balance of the centrality of the celebrations of the Paschal Triduum and the demands of the measures to stem the transmission of the Covid-19. The balance has to be met in the one hand of the essentials of the celebrations and on the other the accommodations due to the precautions to stem the transmission of the virus.

I. We remind all priests that we will continue to celebrate the Holy Week and Paschal Triduum even in the absence of our assembly. The celebrations will be simpler this year because of the absence of our faithful but we will make every effort to keep the dignity and solemnity of our celebrations by following the liturgical form by which the Church has entrusted to us these celebrations. This is in line with our directive in our previous circular.



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle washes the feet of a young person during the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord’s Supper at the Manila Cathedral on April 18, 2019. ROY LAGARDE

II. Again we enjoy all to keep the prescribed social distancing, hygiene protocols and sanitation of our spaces for the liturgy.

III. It is beneficial for the people to follow the live streaming of the celebrations. Every diocese is encouraged to live stream their celebrations. The online celebrations should also aim at generating an affinity of the faithful to the local Church. The importance of the domestic/family church stands out during this time. Like the early Church which was a “Domus Ecclesiae” a domestic/family church our families will come together to celebrate the great mysteries of our faith uniting themselves with the local Church through the celebrations transmitted through internet, tv or radio.

IV. Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion: “Misa Sine Populo”. We propose two options:

A. For the blessing of Palms, the faithful who will be following the celebration on TV can hold their palm branches (or any available branch of leaves) while the prayer of blessing of Palms is prayed by the Presider. In this case, those who follow the celebration on TV, there is no need for Holy Water to bless the Palm branches.

B. After the Mass the presider can go around the streets of the parish at a previously announced time, to bless the palms without using Holy Water, of the faithful who wait in front of their homes. The priest makes the sign of the cross as he passes through the streets. The blessing with Holy Water might cause commotion. A loud speaker may be used to make people aware that the priest is passing

by. The Lector also reads the Passion Narrative along the way. All of these must be done with only two to three ministers to accompany the priests. This is to avoid gathering of people.

V. Holy Thursday

A. Chrism Mass

Each Local Ordinary needs to discern on the day and the place of the Chrism Mass. The decision must be done considering the recommendations of the Civil and Health authorities.

The celebration will be simplified because of the absence of the faithful, the choir and other lay ministers.

Only the clergy will be allowed to be inside the Cathedral/church, observing social distance, hygiene and sanitation of the space for the liturgical celebration.

The faithful can follow the celebration through the internet, TV or radio.

B. Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper

The Explanatory rite of the “Washing of the Feet” may be omitted or simplified (reduced number of persons whose feet are washed).

The altar of repose will be set in the sacristy, a simple tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament may be reposed.

There is an option that after the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, without the faithful, the priest with only two or three ministers, will carry the Blessed Sacrament in a Ciborium with humeral veil, rides on a pick up vehicle and goes to all the streets within the parish. This becomes the *Visita Iglesias* of the faithful this year.

People with lighted candles wait in front of

their homes.

Someone may read repeatedly the Gospel Narrative of the Last Supper, during the procession.

VI. Good Friday Veneration of the Cross

We offer our faithful reflections on the Passion of the Lord through TV, internet and radio, before the Celebration of the Veneration of the Cross.

Please refer to our previous instructions on the proper way of veneration of the Cross.

After the Commemoration of the Lord’s Passion, without the faithful, the presider in red cope or red stole over a surplice and cassock, rides a pick up vehicle as he carries a Crucifix and goes to all the the streets of the parish.

People with lighted candles wait in front of their homes to venerate the Cross by kneeling down.

VII. Easter Vigil

We celebrate the Easter vigil following the liturgy prescribed in the Roman Missal. One may reduce the number of readings as allowed by the Missal. We celebrate this Vigil as the Mother of all Vigils, leading our people to greater hope in the victory of Risen Lord who conquered sin and death. In the experience of the pandemic, the Resurrection of the Lord is the certainty of our victory.

The number of needed ministers needs to be regulated also for this celebration, including the choir. If there will be Baptism, only the parents and God-parents should be inside the Church.

After the Easter Vigil Celebration, without the faithful, the presider with humeral veil, rides on a pick up carrying the Blessed Sacrament in monstrance, goes around the parish.

The parishioners with lighted candles may bring at the door or windows of their homes the statue of the Blessed Mother. This becomes the Salubong of the parish this year.

VIII. The Care of the Poor

We need to create programs and systems that will translate the effects of the Celebrations of the Paschal Triduum in our care for the poor among us. The journey of Lent that culminates in Easter forms in us the new man and woman in the risen Lord. He strengthens us to live like him, giving oneself to love others especially the poor and the needy. There are many brothers and sisters of ours who are affected financially by the long quarantine.

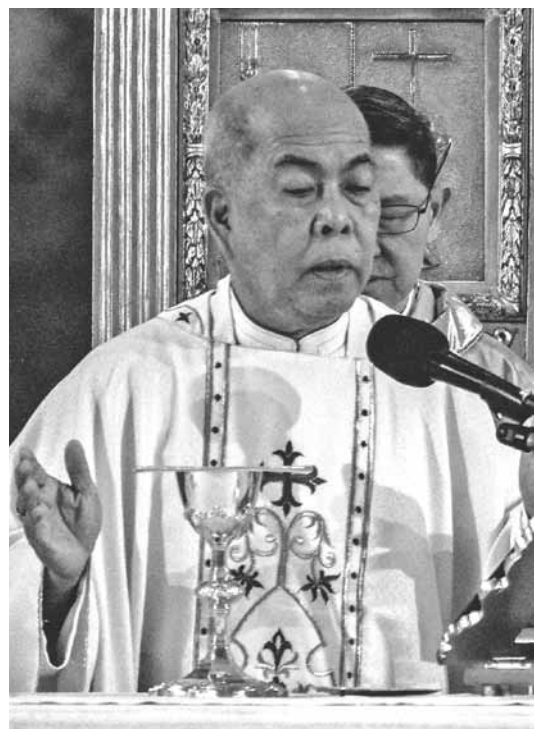
Concrete actions must be done in this regard in collaboration with our BEC leaders and communities.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.
Archbishop of Davao
President, CBCP

Supplement to the Recommendations for Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Celebrations in Time of Covid-19

Circular No. 20-19



Archbishop Romulo Valles, CBCP President.

TO ALL THE BISHOPS AND THE DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATORS

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, and Reverend Administrators:

RE: Supplement to the Recommendations for Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Celebrations in Time of Covid-19

THIS present Circular is a supplement to our previous recommendations, Circulars No. 20-14 and No. 20-15. At the same time, the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS) has also released two (2) Decrees/Instructions relevant to our Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Liturgical Celebrations in the context

of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will refer to these two documents as Vatican Guidelines.

All these instructions on the liturgical celebrations of the Church during this time of world crisis should help us find the balance between the worthy celebration of the liturgy of the Rites of Holy Week and the call of our health and civil authorities to help stem the rapid transmission of the Corona Virus Disease.

Relative to the above, especially with the recent instructions from the Holy See, we have this present Circular containing additional observations and suggestions of Fr. Genaro Diwa, Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy, for the celebrations of Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum:

On the Liturgical Celebrations of Holy Week

1. Avoid Concelebrations: The recent Vatican Guidelines specifically instruct us to avoid concelebrations since our celebrations must also show our sincere efforts at avoiding the gathering of people.

2. Omitting the Sign of Peace: The recent Vatican Guidelines indicate “omitting the sign of peace”. But we can still do the giving of the sign of peace since in our recent practice it is done now through the nodding or bowing of the head. (cf. CBCP Circular No. 20-05, dated January 29, 2020: Discourage our faithful from holding hands during the singing/praying of the “Our Father” and shaking of hands during the Sign of Peace).

3. The Vatican Guidelines emphasize that all our Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Celebrations be made available to our faithful:

a. That the Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Celebrations should be brought to our faithful through radio, television, and social media;

b. That the schedules of these broadcasts should be known to our faithful so they can

follow, in spirit, these celebrations;

c. That these scheduled celebrations made available to the faithful should be LIVE coverages.

4. On our Previous Suggestion (cf. CBCP Circular 20-15): For the presider of the celebrations to go around the parish after every celebration whether to bless the Palms, bring the Blessed Sacrament and the Cross:

This should be considered with great caution, having in mind not to give an opportunity for our faithful to congregate outside their homes. In such a scenario, it will be very difficult to implement the “social distancing” measure. Moreover, such a scenario will be in contradiction to the lock down and “stay at home” measures now enforced in many places.

On this matter, close coordination with local government and health authorities should be done.

5. Palm Sunday: Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

a. “The Commemoration of the Lord’s Entrance into Jerusalem is to be celebrated within the church, the sacred building.” (Vatican Guidelines, March 25, 2020).

b. The same Vatican Guidelines recommend the use of the “Second Form: Solemn Entrance” for the Cathedral churches and the “Third Form: Simple Entrance” for the Parish churches. However, we recommend upon closer study that we use the “Second Form: Solemn Entrance” but in a modified way. Since the blessing of the palm branches is in this form, it may be used at the Entrance Rite when the presider is already in the sanctuary.

c. When the faithful follow this celebration through radio, television, and social media, the blessing of their palms or any leaf/branches is imparted by the Scriptural Reading and Prayer of Blessing during the celebration. In their homes there is no need for holy water for

the blessing of their palm branches.

6. The Chrism Mass

a. Both Vatican Guidelines allow us this: After thorough assessment of the situation of the diocese in the face of the threat of Covid-19 and in compliance with the call of our government and health authorities to avoid mass gatherings, each bishop may transfer the Chrism Mass to another date when this crisis has ended.

b. Holy Oils: In this situation, if the diocese will need new Chrism, the Bishop may consecrate some amount of Chrism. The Oil of the Sick may be blessed by each priest during the celebration of the Anointing of the Sick, as the need arises. This is provided for in the Rite of Anointing of the Sick.

7. Holy Thursday: The Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper

a. Please refer to our previous Circular (cf. CBCP Circular No. 20 – 15).

b. A Particular Note: The recent Vatican Guidelines say, “The faculty to celebrate Mass on this day in a suitable place, without the people, is granted in an exceptional manner to all priests.”

This means that each priest may celebrate the Mass alone on this occasion. This is due to the intrinsic connection between the priesthood and the Eucharist, the anniversaries of which are highlighted in the liturgical celebration of this evening.

8. Good Friday: Friday of the Passion of the Lord

a. Please refer to our previous Circular (cf. CBCP Circular No. 20 – 15).

b. The liturgy is the usual Liturgy of the Friday of the Passion of the Lord found in the Roman Missal.

c. The recent Vatican Guidelines indicate that the Presider alone will do the kissing in the Veneration of the Cross.

d. In the Solemn Universal Prayers in this Supplement / B7

Hope in the face of sickness and death

WE, the consecrated people, have been trained to hope against hope (Romans 4:18). And we are challenged to show this to people whom we have professed to serve, especially in this time when this contagious pandemic called COVID-19 is threatening all of us. We too are vulnerable and would like to take precautions.

As men and women of prayer, let us pray that our government leaders, national and local, may find a way to contain the rapid spread of the virus and that our population as one Filipino people may cooperate with the doctors, health workers and military on the ground.

As prophets and mystics of our times, in cooperation with our bishops and the clergy, we are expected to show our solidarity and oneness with the poor who are bearing most the adverse impact of the "enhanced community quarantine." They are the informal settlers, the daily-wage earners and the marginalized, the homeless, the street dwellers, the jeepney, bus and tricycle drivers, the garbage collectors, and many others. They are not far away from us. They live near our convents. Our gift to them is our prophetic witnessing – PRESENCE.

Examples

Presence means being visible to them in the streets, like the Pope walking in the empty street in front

of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican. The Pope somehow kept the prophetic words, "they shall know that there was a prophet among them" (Ezek. 33:33).

You can do more like Fred, 40 years old, who showed much hope in the prison cell for eight years, being accused of selling shabu, but was acquitted for being falsely accused. He slept beside his fellow-inmate who had advanced tuberculosis. "We shared the same breath, but I did not get tuberculosis. I do not think any virus can infect me now." Fred lost his job as a laborer in a construction company. He has four children and a wife. His survival plan? "Simple lang po napulot kong aral sa loob, kumapit sa Diyos na siyang pag-asa." (I learned a simple lesson in prison, hold on to God who is hope.)

Hope

In these long days of uncertainty, confusion and want, let the presence of the members of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines be a sign of God's presence of hope and love. Let our inherent gift of fraternal joy as members of our congregations be more contagious than the virus itself, to reverse the gloomy mood of our times. "Where there is sadness, let me sow joy." This is precisely our vocation as prophets of our times, to tell the world that the downward trend can be reversed, by our attitudes and authentic



Nuns from the Sisters of Charity of St. Charles Borromeo distribute food packs to poor households in Brgy. Francisco, Tagaytay City March 31. The nuns assigned at the congregation's formation house cut their food allowance in order to provide aid to some families that have been hit hard by Covid-19 lockdown. CBCPNEWS

witnessing.

We can now begin our healings by communicating our hope, faith and charity, in the groceries, supermarkets and drug stores, and elsewhere and through the social media, as we await for the vaccines which we hope will protect us from

sickness and untimely death, but will make us live and turn us into persons and communities more grateful to God who is our true hope and salvation.

To God be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

For AMRSP,

Fr. Cielito R. Almazan, OFM
Sr. Marilyn A. Java, RC

Co-Chairpersons, Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP)

Advocacy calls to plug the gaps in government response in COVID-19 pandemic crisis

National Secretariat for Social Action/Caritas Philippines



The Malate Catholic School Gymnasium in Manila was among the several Catholic schools that serve as a shelter for the street dwellers affected by the enhanced community quarantine due to COVID-19 outbreak. PHOTO FROM MCS

AS the entire country has just been placed under the state of calamity due to the escalating spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), we offer our prayers for our people, particularly the poor and most vulnerable sectors, who will bear the heavier burden caused by the present crisis.

With the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), we also acknowledge our responsibility to participate in addressing this national emergency: "This is a time of difficulty but also a time for growing in true discipleship as we strive to follow the Lord in selfless love and service of others."

In the spirit of solidarity, and in support of our government in our efforts to adopt decisive measures to respond to this pandemic crisis, we would like to offer our recommendations, re-echoing the appeals of other civil society

organizations, in ensuring that the welfare of all, particularly the poorest and the most vulnerable, is considered in government policy and interventions.

We strongly call on our government to consider the following points, to plug the gaps in the government's response:

1. Food and medical assistance should be provided for free to the affected households giving priority to the depressed areas in Metro Manila, and in Luzon, in general. The government must provide support and subsidy (financial or in kind) to support the basic needs of the poorest in the communities.

The government should look at its fiscal space and free up funds that may be used to acquire food, medical supplies, and other goods that will address their daily needs.

The Office of the President has large budgetary allocations by way

of Intelligence Fund, Confidential Fund, President's Social Fund, and other items in the GAA 2020 that should be scrutinized for flexibility as additional resources that can be mobilized immediately.

2. Workers, especially daily income earners, should be provided with substantial emergency assistance package including displacement insurance to compensate for loss of income during the whole period of forced quarantine. It should be in the form of comprehensive financial assistance and unemployment benefits, and not loans. The one-time financial assistance of PhP 5,000.00 to cover the unpaid leaves of the affected workers, under DOLE's COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (DOLE Department Order 209), is not enough.

3. The community-based package of assistance providing emergency employment for the

displaced workers, called TUPAD or Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged and Displaced Workers must be implemented and made operational efficiently and should cover the entire affected workforce.

4. Treatment should be made readily available at cost to the government, in cases of confirmed COVID cases. Mass testing should be conducted in all areas as a prevention and containment measure. There is emerging evidence of best practices from other countries on how testing can be ramped up and scaled up. If a house to house approach is necessary, then it should be done.

5. Mass disinfection should be undertaken in areas where people usually congregate including terminals, government offices, public transport, courts. In the spirit of bayanihan, the people should be mobilized in the effort. All those

part of the drive should be medically equipped. The government must ensure the protection of the frontline workers by providing them the necessary gears and apparatuses for protection and also access to free transportation services.

6. Checkpoints must be supervised by health professionals who are trained to respond when there are cases of suspected COVID carriers. Remember that any potential carrier should NOT be treated like criminal offenders. We are confronting a health crisis, not a military problem. Extreme compassion should be exercised at all times.

7. Congress must appropriate additional funds for the response. To fund these initiatives, the existing calamity funds, MOOE of concerned government institutions including schools, courts, among others must be maximized. The interventions should not be debt-creating given that the government intends to access loans from international financial institutions.

8. A moratorium on payment of mortgages, interests on loans, and financial obligations including payment of utilities and household bills, waiving of rentals, and the like, should be enforced. Filipino families must be un-burdened with these obligations at a time when the preoccupation should be prevention, containment and treatment.

9. Community level citizens desks should be set up as a feedback, grievance, and action mechanism. Support must be prepared and provided for the psychosocial wellbeing of our fellow Filipinos, on an individual, family, and community level, as this will be an urgent need in the coming days and weeks.

10. The Government should speak in a unified voice. If DOH is the lead agency that should oversee the enhanced lockdown, they must be the sole source for information and direction to avoid confusion and miscommunication. Hourly updates, as to the progress of the intervention, must be communicated by health experts and experienced science communicators who should be the ones holding the press conferences.

Again, united with our Bishops, we continually entrust our country to our compassionate God: "In this time of crisis let us put our trust in the Lord who accompanies and strengthens our faith. May He open our hearts to help those in need and move us to genuine compassion for our brothers and sisters who suffer."

City of Manila
March 18, 2020

A call and invitation to a Special Day of Prayer for our frontline medical personnel in this time of crisis

Circular No. 20-18

TO ALL THE BISHOPS AND THE DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATORS

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies and Reverend Administrators:

Although I am quite sure that many of us, if not all, have been remembering and keeping in our prayers, like our *Oratio Imperata*, those who are in the medical frontline of our collective efforts to face the menace that the Corona Virus disease has brought to our people, we make this call and invitation to all our bishops, clergy and religious, and to all our faithful, to be united in a

- Special Day of Prayer for All our Frontline Medical Personnel in our fight against the Corona Virus Disease Pandemic
- On March 29, 2020, the 5th Sunday of Lent
- We do this in all our Masses, our Rosaries, during our Holy Hour, and in our moments of Personal Prayer.

Our fervent prayers for them:

For our doctors, nurses, medical staff, all people working in hospitals and clinics, all our medical specialists and researchers, and all those personnel in our DOH:

- Our prayer of gratitude to the Lord for their heroic service to our people in these difficult times.
- Our prayer to the Lord for their continued safety and well-being.

- Our prayer to the Lord for those among them who lost their lives, having been infected by the disease itself, the disease that they were precisely fighting against. Let us pray for their grieving families and loved ones.
- Our prayer to the Lord for those among them who are sick and those who are getting over-fatigued.
- Our prayer to the Lord that they may receive the much-needed material support and assistance to perform their duties as medical frontliners in this crisis situation.

We leave it to each diocese and its parishes to concretize this general call to prayer in your liturgies and pastoral directives. This may be articulated in our introduction to the masses, homilies, prayers of the faithful, and intentions in our rosaries and holy hour. Of course we continue praying our *Oratio Imperata*.

May our prayers move us to action:

Among the actions of support we can do is to remind ourselves and our people to cooperate with and obey and follow the quarantine measures that our local government directed us to follow, most especially the directive to stay at home.

Another action we can do: It has come to our attention that many medical personnel, doctors, nurses, and medical staff are now in a problematic situation. They are



Nuns from the Our Mother of Perpetual Help Sisters help cook food at a "Community Kitchen for Frontliners" set up inside the compound of Baclaran Church March 24, 2020. BACLARAN CHURCH

hesitant to go back to their families, and their families and children are hesitant to receive them at home—for the simple obvious reason: they fear that the Corona Virus Disease might be transmitted to them. Also we heard that some landlords are now becoming hesitant to allow them to come home to their rented places for fear of the transmission of this disease.

May our prayer move us to action: As dioceses and parishes, can we

start assisting them by providing facilities for them to go home to, some place for rest and sleep, and perhaps some meals—a second home for our dedicated medical frontliners—like some available buildings and rooms in our dioceses and parishes, for example, formation centers, retreat houses, and pastoral centers? And of course, with well-prepared hygienic protocols as we make these places available for them.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration of this call and invitation. Let us continue praying for each other.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.
Archbishop of Davao
CBCP President
26 March 2020

God is in control, compassionate, and will crown us

HOW do we feel with everything that's going on right now? It's a natural feeling to be worried, anxious, or even afraid. However, we should never let those emotions paralyze us. Don't let fear lead us into passivity or isolation. We should let our sights look beyond our current situation and focus our vision on God. The book of Deuteronomy says, "be valiant and strong, do not fear or tremble before them for Yahweh, your God, is with you; He will not leave you or abandon you" (Deut 31:6).

Even in the midst of these calamities, sickness, and pandemic, our Almighty God is reminding us, "fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). And our Lord Jesus is constantly reassuring us "courage! Don't be afraid. It's me" (Matthew 14:27).

My brothers and sisters, in these perilous times, let us turn to God and trust Him more. Let us rely on God and commit everything to Him. The Lord is faithful (2 Thes 3:3). During this time of uncertainty, let me impart three important messages about our merciful God:

God is still in control of everything. **God is compassionate** to us. **God will crown us** in the end.

First, let us not forget that our God is powerful. He is our creator, as Saint John the Evangelist reminds us "all things were made through Him and without Him nothing came to be" (John 1:2). Let us always remember, God sits on the throne forever and He is in control of every living creature. As our good and loving God, he will never abandon us so much so he will never ignore our petitions. He will never let us down. So, come to God and remain in Him.

With the coronavirus pandemic and other catastrophes, the answer lies in our hands (Diocesan directive dated 01 March 2020). Fold our hands in prayers, submit ourselves to God as we lift up our prayers to Him. In praying, we acknowledge God's power and sovereignty over us and all of His creation. He will give what is best for us. He will bless us for He promised, "I will restore you to health and heal your wounds" (Jeremiah 30:17). Let us then place everything under God's care.

With the proper use of our hands and concerted efforts, we can do better. It is now our mandate to disinfect our parish Churches and its surroundings. Let us provide free alcohol, hand sanitizers, and



Bishop Ruperto Santos of Balanga. SCREENSHOT/SABINS STUDIO

when possible, face masks. Extraordinary lay ministers of the Holy Eucharist are obliged to wear masks during the distribution of the Holy Communion. *Kumpisalang Bayan* is temporarily suspended and general absolutions can be given with proper catechesis. We, the priests, just like the doctors and nurses, are frontliners inside and outside of the Church, serving the people.

To give one's hand is to comfort and to care. Our elderly, the sick, and those who are taking medications are dispensed from Sunday obligations. As preventive measures, we advised our school children to temporarily forego attending the Holy Mass. Watching and hearing Sunday masses from television and radio are sufficient in this situation.

In as much as we want to gather our people around the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we support and abide by the call of our local officials to avoid mass gatherings to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. We desire to still be able to provide for the people's spiritual nourishment and not deprive them of the Bread of Life but at the same time, we do not want to endanger the lives of many.

We prioritize the common good and safety of our people. It is best to suspend the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the areas where there are confirmed positive coronavirus cases. These are in the parish Churches of Orani and Balanga.

Our Churches will be open for our people who would like to pray, observing the prescribed social

distancing. Our assigned priests in the parishes, with their discretion, can celebrate Holy Masses through live streaming.

Our decision of canceling the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is our way of living the spirit of Lent; to intensify the longing for our Lord Jesus and to perform acts of sacrifices for everybody's sanctification.

Secondly, let us always remember that God is compassionate. He deeply cares for us and is very much concerned about our wellbeing. Our gracious God did not even spare His own Son for our salvation. St. John the Evangelist assures us "yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him may not be lost, but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

So, do not panic because of the coronavirus pandemic. God is much bigger than all of these. He can conquer all. He is intimately involved in every aspect of our lives and is concerned with our sufferings. He will never abandon or ignore us. The Bible says: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

Our very own Filipino proverb I is very applicable to our worrisome situation. We should not be the source of the problem but rather a part of the solution. Help instead of hoard. Be truthful and disregard false information. Give hope rather than being prophets of doom. Be

sacred and not scared. Our Lord Jesus is our refuge amid this coronavirus pandemic. Trust and hold on to His words: "go your way, your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:52).

The Holy Eucharist is the focal point and culmination for us Catholics. With the cancellation of the Holy Eucharist, let us show others that we *become with what we eat*. Let us speak God's words and share to others the Good News of His love through the sacrificial Lamb. Instead of being idle due to a *lockdown*, *self-quarantine*, and suspension of classes, let us speak about forgiveness and charity. Communicate with respect, affection, and humility. With the live streaming of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist at home, be the body of Jesus. Be the living bread to one another. Just like what Jesus did, break the bread and partake with them. Do something to preserve, promote, and uplift each other's lives. Being together again with the family impels us to ask: how much time have we been together at family meals? Have we been together as a family at the Holy Eucharist?

Lastly, let us always realize that in spite of everything, God triumphs. God is always victorious. He conquers everything. The Book of Psalm affirms "from the Lord comes deliverance" (Ps 3:8). Our hope is always in God. He is our very present help in time of need. He heals.

Coronavirus in this Season of Lent is our "forty days and forty nights" (Matthew 4:2) in our earthly pilgrimage to Heaven. It is a threat to our precious lives, thorns to our jobs, and a heavy burden to the global economy. But Jesus assures us "you will have trouble in the world; but take courage! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

There is the reality of sickness and uncertainty in our lives, as well as the reality of the cross, which we have to bear or even be crucified. In the end, a **crown** awaits us, either of glory or of thorns. God promised to reward those who love him and persevere during trials. Ask ourselves, have we ignored God, set Him aside, and think of ourselves as self-sufficient when we go through some real hard times? Have we mocked God or let Him be ridiculed by others and we just laughed out loud? Have we fallen to the trap of conceit and arrogance, puffing ourselves up thinking we got it all?

Let us never forget God, more so in these dangerous times of coronavirus. Let us recognize His

power and might. What a difference it makes knowing Jesus Christ is King and that He reigns supreme and everything is under His authority. He will lead us to the rightful cure and corresponding remedy. We should not doubt God nor rebel against Him even if he does not seem to answer right away. Do not be impatient with God or attempt to do anything against His will. Instead, come to Him boldly and expectantly, trusting that He knows what's best for us and can use even the most difficult and trying times for good. Let us cry out to God, acknowledge His providential care and rest on his unchanging mercy and abounding Grace. The words of St. James apply to us when he writes: "happy are those who patiently endure trials, because afterwards they will receive the crown of life which the Lord promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).

Let us pray...

O loving God, you are the Miracle Worker. We know you are always concerned about our needs. Hear our prayers in this time of uncertainty. We pray that you control the coronavirus pandemic. We fervently ask that you display your power and stop the rapid spread of this deadly virus. Manifest your presence to those who have already been infected. Give them hope and courage and may your miraculous healing hands be upon them. We also ask that you protect the healthcare workers involved in the areas of outbreaks. May they stay healthy and grant them the stamina to work for the severely ill. We pray for the scientists working tirelessly to find a cure. Grant them the wisdom so they may discover a vaccine against this virus. We also lift up to you the drug making companies. May they stand against unscrupulous practices and not be motivated by profit over patients. Finally, we ask that you direct the government authorities according to your ways so they may work diligently and have the people's best interest at heart. Come to our rescue O Heavenly Father and let us combat our fears and worries with the assurance that you will show compassion in this time of great need. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!

+RUPERTO CRUZ SANTOS, D.D.
Bishop of Balanga
March 18, 2020

The Fugitive—abandoned by men and God

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, Year A (Matt 26:14-27:66)
April 5, 2020

By Msgr. Lope C. Robredillo, SThD

LIKE other synoptic writers, Matthew portrays Jesus as the bringer of the Kingdom of God. By Kingdom of God he does not mean a religious-political theocracy in which God is represented by the high priest, or a community in which only the good and perfect people form part. By Kingdom he means God's rule in a community in which the poor are not discriminated against, sinners are accepted, and the humble, the suffering and the oppressed come into their own. It is a community in which people experience acceptance, forgiveness, reconciliation, unity and love. In other words, it is the fulfillment of God's promise to the prophets that he will live among his people. As a bringer of the Kingdom, he actualized it in his dealings with the people, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. In particular, his parables and miracles were meant to indicate God's forgiving and healing word and action are now touching the very lives of his people. His fellowship with sinners was a living parable of salvation and forgiveness. In Jesus God was sharing his very life with Israel.

This was not the way Jesus' contemporaries saw him, however. The Jewish leaders refused to see him as God's eschatological messenger. Judging him on the basis of their understanding of the Law, the Jewish leaders, according to the Gospels, regarded him as one who claimed authority that was more than human. For example, he set his interpretation of the Law against the prevailing one in the community; he is portrayed as violating the Sabbath, and he even challenged the tradition of the Jewish Elders.

In the Jewish perspective of the Law, Jesus was seen as a false prophet, and in cahoots with the prince of demons. And when he said something about the Temple that was unacceptable to the leaders of the nation, they viewed his action not as something linked with the Kingdom of God, which it was, but as an assault on their authority. But those who were against him were not only the Jewish leaders and their cronies. The leaders themselves found allies among the political leaders. In particular, they had the Governor on their side, and considering that they themselves had no power to put someone to death, they found in Pilate a perfect partner.

The significance of the Easter Gospel

Easter Sunday, Year A, (John 20:1-9 / Lk 24:13-35)
April 12, 2020

By Msgr. Lope C. Robredillo, SThD

AN ancient wisdom advises that if one wishes to conquer, he has to divide the enemy. However invincible one appears to be, it is simply impossible to fight on many fronts and win, as Adolf Hitler realized too late. If one wishes to reform the nation, he cannot therefore afford to antagonize the people, quarrel with the political establishment and go up against the religious establishment. Once he does these, he will virtually be a goner. Nothing is in store for him except defeat. The fate of Jesus appears to be like this. From the Roman and Jewish point of view, Jesus, who had invited the people to repent and enter the Kingdom of God, had to die. Because of his teaching and behavior, the Jewish leaders accused him, among others, of threatening to destroy the Temple (Mark 14:58), of leading people astray as a false prophet (John 7:12; Matt 27:63), and of assuming divine prerogative (Mark 14:64). These charges, of course, would not make sense in a Roman trial. This is why the Jewish leaders brought him to Pilate, the Roman governor, on charges of insurrection: subverting the nation, opposing tax payment and pretending to be king (Luke 23:3). And it is almost historically certain that Rome gave the verdict: capital punishment.

But the end of Jesus was not defeat. Those who opposed him never triumphed. He was not a goner, after all. For God reversed the verdict. He raised Jesus from the dead (1 Thess 1:10; Rom 10:9). The Jewish and Roman leaders took his life; God gave him a new one. This is the Easter Gospel. Resurrection, however, is a metahistorical event; it



Since the Jewish leaders could not accuse Jesus of being a false prophet before Pilate, since this would not make sense to him, they denounced him as a pretender to the throne. Which explains the charge that was written on the cross and the capital punishment. The charge, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," was something a Roman governor could understand, and the fact that Jesus was crucified clearly indicates that Pilate considered him a rebel, crucifixion being a Roman punishment for insurgents. One can see, therefore, that the religious and the political leaders saw him as dangerous, and therefore had to be eliminated. It is not surprising that in some gospel passages, it can be noticed that Jesus recognized how precarious his life was.

Clearly, he had no one powerful enough either in the government or in the state religion to support him. He could not even walk openly. And one could just imagine the psychological effect these had on Jesus. To bring home the point, one may just make a mental picture of himself being hunted down not only by the executive department with the military, but also by the judiciary and the institutional religion—where could one go to? He could only live the life of a fugitive, and that is not easy. Of course, a fugitive from the law can still hide, if he has supporters to shelter him. But even this was denied him. On the contrary, one from his own group betrayed him. And even those who promised to die for him eventually ran when the authorities caught up with him. Jesus, in other words, was abandoned not

only by those who represented his own people, but even by those who were supposed to protect him. No life could be more painful than this. Men abandoned him.

Of course, the abandonment of him by his own men and the institutions of the country, not to say the scourging, the carrying of the cross and the crucifixion, could still be borne if he had someone to cling to. After all, we are often told that when one knows someone understands him, loves him, clings to him and accepts him for what he is and without condition, he can bear almost any kind of pain. That this is true—this is easily verified when we hear the stories of people who have been imprisoned, or tortured, or who are separated from their wives either as sailors or as contract workers abroad. The certainty, the assurance that someone loves us is sufficient ground to survive and bear all the difficulties.

In the life of Jesus, one easily identifies his ground of existence with his Father. People may not have understood him, but he was certain that his Father did. After all, in the gospels he claims that no one knows the Father except the Son and no one knows the Son except the Father, and those he has chosen to reveal him. In the end, however, he was unsupported in his sufferings, the Father never freed him from it. This is probably the meaning of his scream at death, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46). That kind of suffering is obviously unspeakable. At any rate, that is how Matthew's passion narrative portrays the death of Jesus—he dies as an abandoned Son of God, the Crucified Messiah.

From exaltation to rejection

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, Year A (Matt 26:14-27:66)
Alay Kapwa Sunday, April 5, 2020

By Fr. Sal Putzu, SDB

AS Jesus decided to move toward Jerusalem one week before the Passover celebration, his disciples were jubilant. And when both the people of Jerusalem and the many thousands of pilgrims joined hands in giving the prophet from Nazareth an enthusiastic reception, the disciples felt sure that finally Jesus was going to openly proclaim that he was the awaited Messiah, and that he would have been crowned king of Israel.

But in Jesus' mind, the decision to enter Jerusalem in such an "official" manner had a very different aim. He had a better Kingdom to proclaim and establish than a temporal reign. His mission was to dethrone Satan, and to establish the sovereignty of God in the hearts of all. Jesus knew that the moment had come for the fulfillment of the most important stage in the Father's plan: the redemption of sinful mankind through his sacrificial death.

He was fully aware of the very high price he would have to pay. Yet, he did not back off. On the contrary, he took the decisive step of entering the Holy City in such a provocative manner, as a sign of his determination to do the Father's will. The following days, he would already be lashing not at the Romans, but at the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. (See for instance, Mt 23.)

Clearly, Jesus was not trying to be popular with the "authorities" who could have supported his bid for power. Like in the episode of the temptation in the desert, he

preferred to be the Messiah of God, rather than the temporal messiah expected by people who have no time for a "spiritual kingdom." He chose to be the humble servant of all, rather than a victorious and arrogant king of this world. (See Mt 20:26-27 and Lk 22:26.)

Such an attitude could not meet the approval of glory-minded and power-addicted people like Judas and those cast in the same mould. Feeling disillusioned, they rejected Jesus disdainfully, as a "useless messiah."

Jesus' determination to remain faithful to God's plan turned the tide against him. It turned the crowds against him, especially through the crafty manipulation orchestrated by the Jewish authorities. That was how the joyful shouts of "Hosanna!" turned into a thunderous demand that Jesus be crucified; the gentle palm branches waved in welcome turned into the merciless scourges that plowed his body, and into the nails that pierced his hands and feet.

What about us? Shall we shut him out of our lives as a "disappointing messiah," or shall we accept him as the embodiment of right priorities, and as the only bearer of God's salvation? The first choice would associate us with Judas and the likes of him. The second choice would place us among those who open their hearts in gratitude to Christ as their Lord and Savior. With this second option we would declare our readiness to stand by him to the very end, no matter what the cost. This is the "JESUS OPTION."

The Eucharist: Christ's empowering and transforming gift

Holy Thursday, Year A, (Jn 13:1-16)
April 9, 2020

By Fr. Sal Putzu, SDB

GIFT-GIVING is an interpersonal and social activity that is found in all human societies. A gift is a sign of love. This is what makes it meaningful and precious far beyond the "commercial value" of the object that is offered. The greater the love, the more precious the gift, even when the object chosen to express it may not be proportioned to the intensity of the love it is meant to signify.

All of us have received gifts, just as all of us have given gifts to some person or other. We should never forget that our very existence, with its rainbow of corollary gifts such as intelligence, affectivity, memory, and all the resources of our bodies, are gifts from the Creator. So is the world in which we live, the family and society into which we were born. All these are signs of God's immensely generous love for us.

Unfortunately, we humans have tainted even this splendid expression of God's love for us with the dark stigma of sin. And so there have been and there are people who use gifts not to express love but enslave and hurt others. These are the gifts of the "Padrino," who buys a guilty silence or obtains an even guiltier cooperation in committing crimes; the gifts of the one who bribes his/her way to success at the expense of worthier ones; the gifts that choke consciences and gag voices in order to let evil prevail and continue . . .

But a genuine gift should always be a sign of generosity and selfless love. Ultimately, it should signify the donor's desire to give himself/herself totally to the recipient, in love. This is why all gifts fall short of really being what they are meant to express. All, except the Eucharist. The Eucharist is precisely what it is meant to be: Christ's total gift of self to us in the fullness of his divinity and humanity, in spite of the poverty of the material elements used to convey it.

It is impossible to express in words the preciousness of the gift of the Eucharist. The more we say or write, the more we feel that we are only mumbling something that miserably falls short of the reality we are talking about. It is only in the life to come that we will be able to understand the preciousness and wonder of the Eucharist, for, indeed, it is "the Mystery of Faith."

But even with all the limitations

that characterize us, it is good that we realize how the Eucharist is a LIFE-GIVING and an EMPOWERING GIFT. It gives life and strength to our weary souls, for in it we receive Jesus himself, the source of our spiritual life. This is why it empowers all the baptized to honor the commitments undertaken at their baptism. It supports the people of every profession and walk of life in the fulfillment of their duties. It sustains the virgins in their effort to keep their hearts and bodies pure as the Lord deserves. It gives the martyrs the strength to witness to their faith even at the cost of their life.

In his generosity, Jesus demands nothing in return. For him, it is enough to give, enrich, strengthen, and empower us. And yet, on our part, if we are people with a sensitive heart, we feel that we must do our best to reciprocate the gift, no matter how short we may fall in our effort. Such a TOTAL GIFT elicits from us a "TOTAL RETURN."

In practical terms, this means that we should make a "gift" of our poor lives—the best we can—to the Lord and to our neighbor. This requires that we do our very best to please God in all we think, say, and do. It demands that we place ourselves at the service of others in all humility and sincerity. It entails forgetting ourselves and giving priority to our neighbor. In short, this demands that we, too, become "eucharist"—a "eucharist" with a small "e"; a pale reflection, we must admit, of the one with a big initial, but the best we can be, nonetheless. This will be our "reciprocation" to the Gift we have received from him. And Jesus will receive it with a sincere, grateful smile, like the one of the parents who accept and appreciate the simple gifts of their little children.

But for this gift of ours to be fully welcomed by Jesus, it must be accompanied by the gift of ourselves, offered in all sincerity and spirit of service, to our neighbor. We should do that in imitation of what Jesus himself did at the Last Supper, when he washed the feet of his disciples. "Do you realize what I have done for you?" he asked them. And he concluded, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." (Jn 13:12b.15)

transcends time and space. It is not like a resuscitation to an old life, as in the raising of the widow's son at Naim (Luke 7:11). It is a new form of existence. Hence, in Luke's resurrection narrative, only a negative witness could be provided. When the women entered the tomb, they did not find Jesus' body (Luke 24:3). But the empty tomb is not an apodictic argument for the resurrection. It could be interpreted differently. In Matthew, for example, the chief priests claimed that the disciples stole the body (Matt 28:12; cf John 20:2). Some claimed that the empty tomb was simply a product of wishful thinking. Others alleged that Jesus merely swooned on the cross and subsequently extricated himself from the bands and the tomb. Hence, faith in the resurrection cannot rest on an incontrovertible empirical evidence.

How then, according to Luke, do we know that Jesus rose from the dead? First, God himself told us in the mouth of two men in dazzling garments who said to the women: "Why do you search for the Living One among the dead? He is not here; he has been raised up" (Luke 24:5b). (According to Jewish law, this testimony is conclusive because two witnesses made it [Deut 19:15]). Second, Jesus himself prophesied it: "The Son of Man must first endure many sufferings, be rejected by the elders, the high priests, and the scribes, and be put to death, and then be raised up on the third day" (9:22,24; 12:50; 17:35; 18:31-33). For Luke, the guarantee of resurrection is the trustworthiness of Jesus' words. Thus, at the instance of the two men, the women disciples

(Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, etc. [24:10]) remembered his words. Of course, they remembered because they had accompanied him in his Galilean ministry (8:1-3), and they witnessed the crucifixion (23:49) and burial (23:55). In Luke's theology, what the women heard was crucial in interpreting the empty tomb. Because of it, they took the empty tomb as a sign that Jesus is alive. Faith thus comes from remembering what is heard (cf Rom 10:17). With this faith, they began to proclaim the Easter Gospel (24:8-9).

What is the significance of the Easter Gospel? The resurrection of Jesus lies at the heart of Christian faith. If he was not raised from the dead, our faith is empty (1 Cor 15:14). God vindicated the persecuted Jesus—he was not a false prophet, after all. On the contrary, he is the Savior (Rom 4:25), the living Lord (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3), the Son (Acts 12:33; Rom 1:34). In fact, all the books of the New Testament were written from the point of view of his resurrection. But not only that. Because God raised him, he will also vindicate those of us who followed him (1 Cor 4:14). Those who died with him will live with him (2 Tim 2:11). Moreover, even in the here and now, the life that Jesus lives is given to us who believe (Rom 8:12). This is made possible through our baptism (Rom 6:4-12). We acquire a new being (2 Cor 5:17-21). Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20). And in Luke's Gospel, the first beneficiary of this new being in Christ is the repentant criminal: "I assure you, this day, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

The good and bad side-effects of coronavirus

By Fr. Shay Cullen

THE good side-effects we can see during this medical crisis brought about by the coronavirus is the love, concern and care shown by the dedicated caregivers, nurses and medical workers. It is phenomenal. The goodness and love of millions of humans has come shining through. There are neighborhood help movements growing online. In Canada, an online network is helping the elderly, neighbors are helping neighbors. In Italy, people are singing from balconies to cheer up those in quarantine. People are changing to a healthy diet also.

Preda Fair Trade Dried Mango fruit with loads of Vitamin C and no chemicals are selling fast in the UK and Ireland. People are changing to a healthy diet to strengthen their immune system to fight off and prevent the flu and hopefully coronavirus.

The Preda dried mangos are available online for ordering if you can't leave home. Go to the www.forestfeast.com online and ask a friend to do it. If you can go shopping to Tesco, Dunnes or Waitrose, you will find the Preda Dried Mangos there under the Forest Feast brand. Buy lots. All earnings from sales go to support the abused children rescued by Preda Foundation and protect them from the Coronavirus. You are doing good for all.

But the greatest good is the dedication of caregivers and medical workers. Eighty-year-old Elizabeth would not survive the coronavirus if not for Margi, her devoted caregiver. Everyday, Margi Gonzalez risks getting infected on her rounds visiting her many patients in the community center. She treats any sores, takes blood pressure and temperature and sees that they are comfortable, fed, and taking her medicine on time. Elizabeth and others are being monitored for the coronavirus after one member of the community tested positive. Thousands of caregivers like Margi are slowing the spread of the deadly contagious infection. She was a migrant from the Philippines to Britain.



PREDA's mango harvest.

There are many good people like Margi on the front line. Many are former migrants or refugees, who fled poverty, oppression, fear and suffering for a new, better life. Now the rich, developed nations benefit from their skills and service. That is a positive result of a sad history of human rights violations and injustice. Margi was marked as a protest leader and fled the death squads employed by a mining firm to quell the protest against the mining corporation taking over their farmland.

That is the paradox, the poor flee as migrants or refugees the hardship caused by the greedy multinational corporations supported by their governments. They exploit the natural resources of poor nations in cahoots with the local corrupt ruling families. These three are the corrupt players behind every conflict. They drive the poor to become migrants and refugees. They in turn become

the caregivers of the nation that exploited and harmed them.

Another positive outcome of the disastrous impact of the coronavirus is the lock-down and restricted international travel. The end to cheap flights and the grounding of thousands of planes, strict screening, setting up roadblocks, demanding IDs, all has a positive effect. This helps to curb human trafficking of young girls and boys into Western countries from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. It is the modern slave trade that has hopefully been slowed.

In an overnight decree, governments banned any and all travel of most people, including the travel of sex offenders, pedophiles and sex tourists and paedophiles on child rape holidays. That is another kind of epidemic. There is no specific law against it. There should be. As the multinationals rape the land of its minerals, the

rich paedophiles come and rape the children. Preda Foundation is fighting this and rescuing the child victims for healing. Preda Fair Trade helps us in this fight as serious as coronavirus. You can help, too.

The young girls and boys are lured into servitude with false promises of well-paid jobs by mafia-like networks. The victims are held in debt bondage and forced to work in the Philippines or rich countries for little or no pay. They are slaves, threatened with beatings and harm to their families in their home countries if they don't cooperate and become slaves or sex workers. Preda Foundation rescues and heals many.

Thousands of descendants of Irish migrants are in the medical profession around the world now fighting coronavirus. From 1845 to 1849, starving Irish migrants fled from British colonial exploitation

of Ireland and the famine that they caused and allowed. British politicians and families had taken Irish land by force and became rich. The Irish were impoverished. They fled as refugees and migrants to America.

The United States was then a land of freedom, hope and opportunity for the oppressed and the poor. Thousands of Irish fought and died in the civil war against slavery. Now, under Trump, it is a closed fortress ruled by an anti-migrant white supremacist clique incapable of responding strongly and correctly to the coronavirus pandemic and allowing it to spread.

We all are challenged to fight the coronavirus by avoiding all contamination by self-quarantine, hand washing, keeping social distance, and getting tested when protocols require. We must respect, honor and support those who are risking all to help us win.

Absolution / B2

into consideration the mind and the criteria...agreed upon with the other members of the episcopal conference" (Apost. Exhortation **Reconciliatio et Paenitentia**, AAS, LXXXVII, 1985, p.270)."

The Special Situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic

After reaffirming the foregoing norms and criteria, the recent Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary states the following:

1) "This Apostolic Penitentiary believes—N.B. it is only stating an opinion, albeit a very prudent one—that, especially in the places most affected by the pandemic contagion and until the phenomenon recedes, the cases of serious need mentioned in can. 961, §2 CIC above mentioned, will occur." In other words, it is not stating that it has occurred, or is occurring, but that it will most probably occur.

2) "Any further specification is delegated by law to diocesan bishops, always taking into account the supreme good of the salvation of souls (cf. can. 1752 CIC)." This phrasing is very important, because it in fact remits to the existing norms contained in the cited canon and further explained by the aforementioned Response

from the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts (Prot. No. 5309/96, 8.XI.1996).

3) "Should there arise a sudden need to impart sacramental absolution to several faithful together, the priest is obliged to warn the diocesan bishop as far as possible or, if he cannot, to inform him as soon as possible (cf. Ordo Paenitentiae, n. 32)."

4) "In the present pandemic emergency, it is therefore up to the diocesan bishop to indicate to priests and penitents the prudent attentions to be adopted in the individual celebration of sacramental reconciliation, such as the celebration in a ventilated place outside the confessional, the adoption of a suitable distance, the use of protective masks, without prejudice to absolute attention to the safeguarding of the sacramental seal and the necessary discretion." In this regard, it is noteworthy that the CBCP, in fact, had given guidelines in this respect, which the different Local Ordinaries had ratified in their proper circumscriptions.

5) "Furthermore, it is always up to the diocesan bishop to determine, in the territory of his own ecclesiastical circumscription and with regard to the level of

pandemic contagion, the cases of grave necessity in which it is lawful to impart collective absolution: for example, at the entrance to hospital wards, where the infected faithful in danger of death are hospitalized, using as far as possible and with the appropriate precautions the means of amplifying the voice so that absolution may be heard." In fact, this is the only novelty of this Note—i.e., citing a very specific case when the exception can be made. Since the norm on general absolution is an exception to a prohibition (to impart general absolution, as laid down in c.961, §1), this specific case should be interpreted in a strict sense—i.e., only in this specific scenario of a COVID-19 infected medical facility, where the confessor cannot enter without prejudice to his own health.

6) "Consideration should be given to the need and advisability of setting up, where necessary, in agreement with the health authorities, groups of extraordinary hospital chaplains, also on a voluntary basis and in compliance with the norms of protection from contagion, to guarantee the necessary spiritual assistance to the sick and dying." To my knowledge, this has not been done in the Philippines.

7) "Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by votum confessionis, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452)." This final disposition bears further looking into as it holds the key to unraveling the controversy that the Note seems to have roused.

Conclusion

The sacraments of the New Law are visible signs, instituted by Jesus Christ in order to convey grace. Not that God is constrained by such sacramental signs to give his grace, but that Jesus Christ instituted the Sacraments so that—under ordinary circumstances—they can be visible signs of his action on the soul of the recipient.

What n.7 above points out is that in the extreme situation, where the sacramental sign of the Sacrament

of Reconciliation cannot be used, through no fault of their own, the contrite penitent is in fact reconciled to God—even with mortal sins—without recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, provided:

There is perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express);

Accompanied by the *votum confessionis*—i.e., the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession.

The controversy that has arisen—involving all kinds of casuistry regarding special circumstances that could warrant a general absolution, but without individual confession of sins—betrays a tendency of absolutizing the role of the Sacrament for God's merciful action. At bottom, what the Note really expresses, is that in the impossibility of administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the manner laid down by canonical norms—including the two exceptions outlined in c.961, §1, 1° & 2°—the merciful Love of God will prevail. There is no need to twist the Sacramental sign to fit our poor human capabilities.

Supplement / B3

liturgy of Good Friday, the recent Vatican Guidelines say, "The bishop will see to it that there is a special intention for the sick, the dead, for those who feel lost or dismayed (cf. Roman Missal pag. 307, no. 13).

In the concrete, this special intention would include those who are presently sick of Covid-19, those who have died because of this disease, as well as our doctors, nurses and other medical staff, health care workers, the frontliners in the food services and relief operations, those keeping peace and order, civil servants, and the poorest among our families who are greatly affected by this crisis.

9. Easter Vigil:

a. Please refer to our previous Circular (cf. CBCP Circular No. 20-15).

b. The recent Vatican Guidelines say that the Easter Vigil

is to be celebrated only in Cathedral and parish churches.

c. This can be celebrated not earlier than 5:00 p.m.

d. The "Lucernarium" can be celebrated but within the building of the Church.

e. In the "Baptismal Liturgy", we only omit the "Ritual of Baptism" and we maintain the "Blessing of Water" (cf. The prayer of blessing used if no one is present to be baptized) and the "Renewal of Baptismal Promises".

Related Considerations:

1. Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Family/Home Celebrations: These we offer to our faithful so that they can use them even if they cannot be physically present in all our liturgical celebrations. It is to be noted that these Family/ Home Celebrations are different and are to be used apart

from the liturgies we offer to our faithful to watch and listen to.

These Family/Home Celebrations can be used after the family has followed the liturgical celebrations of the Church through radio, television, and social media. The father or any of the elders of the household can lead the celebration.

We will send you the PDF copy of these celebrations so you can translate these to your native language and eventually disseminate them to your parishes.

2. The Need for Confession when No Priest is Available: The opportunity of celebrating the Sacrament of Confession is extremely difficult to have during this crisis situation.

Thus, we remind our clergy that our faithful should be instructed on the issue of the need for Confession in a situation when no priest is

available. On this problematic pastoral situation, Pope Francis has made this clarification, echoing the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Nos. 1451 and 1452):

"I know that many of you go to confession before Easter... Many will say to me: 'But Father...I can't leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord. I want Him to embrace me... How can I do that unless I find a priest?'. Do what the catechism says. It's very clear. If you don't find a priest to go to confession, speak to God. He's your Father. Tell Him the truth: 'Lord. I did this and this and this. Pardon me.' Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise Him, 'afterward I will go to confession.' You will return to God's grace immediately. You yourself can draw near, as the

catechism teaches us, to God's forgiveness, without having a priest at hand." (Homily, Casa Santa Marta Chapel, Pope Francis, March 20, 2020).

3. Guidelines for Those Who Minister to those Affected by the COVID-19: We are also sending you a copy of the Guidelines for Those Who Minister to those Affected by the COVID-19.

4. Modified Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Celebrations: We will also send you, the soonest, copies of the modified Holy Week and Paschal Triduum Celebrations, to guide our clergy and our faithful.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ROMULO G. VALLES, D.D.
Archbishop of Davao
CBCP President
31 March 2020

CINEMA
Catholic Initiative for Enlightened Movie Appreciation

TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT	MORAL ASSESSMENT
5: Excellent	
4: Above Average	
3: Average	
2: Below Average	
1: Poor	

CINEMA RATING

VA: For all ages	V14: Ages 14+
V13: Ages 13 below, Parental Guidance	V18: Ages 18+
	NPV: Not for Public Viewing

The Call of the Wild

DIRECTOR: Chris Sanders
LEAD CAST: Harrison Ford, Dan Stevens, Omar Sy, Cara Gee, Karen Gillan, Bradley Whitford, Colin Woodell
PRODUCER: Erwin Stoff
SCRIPTWRITER: Michael Green
BASED ON: The Call of the Wild by Jack London
MUSIC: John Powell
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Janusz Kamiński
EDITOR: William Hoy, David Heinz
PRODUCTION COMPANY: 20th Century Studios, 3 Arts Entertainment
DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Studios
COUNTRY: United States
LANGUAGE: English
RUNNING TIME: 100 minutes

Technical assessment: 3.5 **Moral assessment: 3.5**
CINEMA rating: V14 **MTRCB rating: PG13**

The comfortable life of Buck, a huge but gentle pet dog of a Santa Clara, California family, ends when he is dognapped and shipped off to the Yukon to be sold as a work dog. He is bought by Perrault and Francoise (Omar Sy and Cara Gee), a couple who delivers mail across the Yukon using a dog sled. Being a former family pet and a mix of St. Bernard/Scotch Collie, Buck is at first clumsy as a sled dog, but in their travels he gradually wins the trust and admiration of Perrault and Francoise. When the mail route is replaced by the telegraph, Buck is sold again, this time to Hal (Dan Stevens), a cruel slave-driver who threatens to shoot Buck

when he refuses to cross a frozen lake. Coming to the rescue of Buck is Jack Thornton (Harrison Ford), the man whose dropped harmonica Buck had picked up and returned at the pier. Thus begins the story of a recluse and a dog who each in his own way answers the call of the wild. This 2020 American adventure film based on the 1903 best selling novel of the same title by Jack London is proof that the appeal of dog stories to a cinematic audience never seems to wane. From Rin Tin Tin to Lassie to Pluto to Bolt to Scoobydoo, whether real dogs, cartoons, or CGI creations, dogs in the movies will always have a place in



the moviegoers' hearts. Buck in The Call of the Wild is no exception. A dog who is as smart as a human being and can even be kinder than one is definitely endearing. Ford is very real as the world-weary Thornton, and he gets more points for making viewers believe he is interacting with a real trained canine actor when in fact he is not. Buck is computer animation all the way, and his performance, coupled with the magnificent sweeping vistas of the Yukon (also CGI, by the way, the film being shot principally in Los Angeles studios), are enough to make The Call of the Wild one thrilling memorable sled ride. This may be a coming-of-age tale of a dog, but humans

can definitely resonate with it. A person begins carefree, as Buck who is naïve enough to walk into a trap set by the unscrupulous. Then, away from his comfort zone, a person goes through the rough and tumble of life, hurts himself and others, falls and rises stronger — like Buck who is battered and shaped and strengthened by working in a team and coping with man's cruelty and greed. Buck finds himself and his destiny through the inspiring guidance of an ancestor, a black wolf that "appears" to Buck at most crucial moments — very much like a person finds the perfection of his being in listening to the Inner Voice and heeding his Creator's wisdom.

ORATIO IMPERATA

PRAYER FOR PROTECTION against the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

God our Father,
 We come to you in our need
 To ask your protection against the Coronavirus (COVID-19),
 That has claimed lives
 And has affected many.

We pray for your grace
 For the people tasked with studying the nature
 and cause
 Of this virus and its disease
 And of stemming the tide of its transmission.

Guide the hands and minds of
 medical experts
 That they may minister to the sick
 With competence and compassion.

And of those governments and
 private agencies
 That must find cure and solution to this epidemic.

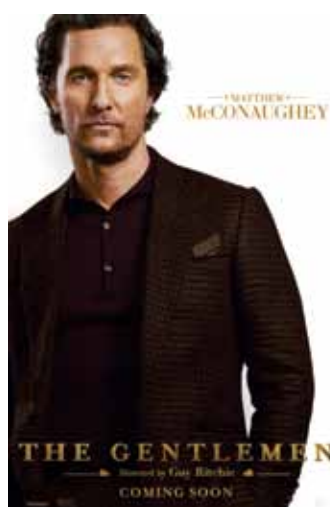
We pray for those afflicted
 May they be restored to health soon.

Grant us the grace
 To work for the good of all
 And to help those in need.

Grant this through our Lord,
 Jesus Christ, your Son,
 Who lives and reigns with You,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 God, forever and ever. Amen.

Mary Help of all Christians, pray for us.
 St. Raphael the Archangel, pray for us.
 St. Rock, pray for us.
 St. Lorenzo Ruiz, pray for us.
 St. Pedro Calungsod, pray for us.

The Gentlemen



DIRECTOR: Guy Ritchie
LEAD CAST: Matthew McConaughey, Charlie Hunnam, Henry Golding, Michelle Dockery, Jeremy Strong, Eddie Marsan, Colin Farrell, Hugh Grant
PRODUCER: Guy Ritchie, Ivan Atkinson, Bill Block
SCRIPTWRITER: Guy Ritchie
STORY: Guy Ritchie, Ivan Atkinson, Marn Davies
MUSIC: Christopher YOUNG
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Alan Stewart
EDITOR: James Herbert
PRODUCTION COMPANY: Miramax
DISTRIBUTOR: STXfilms, Entertainment Film Distributors
COUNTRY: United Kingdom, United States
LANGUAGE: English
RUNNING TIME: 113 minutes

Technical assessment: 3.5
Moral assessment: 2.5
CINEMA rating: V18
MTRCB rating: R13

American expat Mickey Pearson (Matthew McConaughey) has built a lucrative marijuana empire in London. When word gets out that he's looking to cash out of the business forever — in order to retire rich and in relative peace with his beloved ambitious wife Rosalind (Michelle Dockery) — everyone jumps in to have a piece of his 400-million-pound cannabis kingdom, including a suave and ambitious young Chinese drug underboss Dry Eye (Henry Golding); Pearson's rival pot kingpin, American billionaire Matthew Berger

(Jeremy Strong); and a Chinese gangster Lord George (Tom Wu). Add to this drooling-after-drugs ensemble the sleazy private detective Fletcher (Hugh Grant) whose forte is digging up dirt about the filthy rich — he will shut up about his findings on Pearson's pot empire in exchange for 20 million pounds — and you have schemes, bribery, blackmail and bloodshed galore. Film critic James Berardinelli sums up the The Gentlemen succinctly when he wrote: "Violence and profanity coalesce in a post-Tarantino fashion that results in some humor bubbling to the surface amidst a testosterone overflow." A tad overpolished, this fast-paced caper's plot may be contrived and complicated but Richie fans may find it entertaining from beginning to end — all 113 minutes of it. Most fun to watch is Grant as the goatee-sporting Fletcher with a Cockney accent — a surprising departure from his usual roles as soft-spoken, mild-mannered, dreamy eyed romantic. Anglo-Asian heartthrob Golding also makes an about-face from his Crazy Rich Asians role and (spoiler coming!) ends up a frozen cadaver here. If you are in the mood for a good crime story crackling with British wit and humor, The Gentleman might be to your taste. Never mind that Ritchie the director does not capitalize on the rich thematic material just lying beneath the film's epidermis — like the connection between media and organized crime, class distinction, the "business" relationship between the underworld and the powers that be, the changes in a man going through midlife — and instead just tells his story, apparently unconcerned that he might be perceived as politically incorrect by certain viewers. One character is referred to as "the Jew", another as "the chinaman", while a third is an Asian character whose name (Phuc) automatically makes him the butt of jokes.

Buhay San Miguel



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