



JESUITS

Euro-Mediterranean Province of the Society of Jesus
Albania - Italy - Malta - Romania
Provincial

To all members of the EUM Province
To all collaborators and friends

Prot. Prov. EUM 20/71

Rome, 27 March 2020

Object: The promise and the question arising within us

In these days of silence and concern, of reflection and of contact and communication with many of you, I have felt the need to write to you again, in order to share with the whole Province the motions that this time is awakening in me and, it seems to me, in many of us too.

We are living a time in the history of our countries and of the whole of humanity that carries with it a burden of death and mourning that leaves us just speechless. Many people die far from their families, in dramatic hospital circumstances and a new kind of reverence, full of dignity and pain, imposes itself to us, when we see images like the Army trucks in procession in Bergamo, full of the coffins of people who have died in the city. We are contemplating Italy first of all, but, unfortunately, one after the other, also other European and world countries, violently hit by the strength of this virus; we see images and we read news of a narrative that we find hard to consider real, but of which we ourselves are part, in our own small way.

Our own apostolic body rediscovers itself fragile and wounded: some of our brothers are affected by the virus or are in quarantine, and our hearts are worried, concerned for parents, relatives, neighbors and collaborators, who are fragile and exposed. The concern of many of our brothers extends also to what the future will be, to the economic and working perspectives, to the conditions that will be determined by the inevitable consequences that this crisis will have for so many families and, even more so, for the most fragile people.

At this time of Lent, the beginning of which in Italy coincided with the detection of the first cases, we find ourselves, with the whole Church, called by the Lord to walk with Him in the desert, "to lead us to the holy mountain / on which the Cross is raised" (as a hymn, which is dear to me, says, in these days). We find ourselves contemplating and "being with" the Lord who suffers in his humanity and with all humanity. It is not easy to stand at the foot of this Cross, which is so close to us, which touches us in our own flesh, in the depths of our lives. The hope of faith, however, enables us to see already, in this mountain, the promise of a new life. "You lead us in the new Exodus / to the profound joy of Easter / from death to life / we will reach the promised Land", so concludes the before-mentioned hymn.

Of this promise, we can already see some signs at this difficult hour.

In the offering of efforts and health, if not when of one's own life, of so many health workers, nurses and doctors, whom a Bishop has called "God's new ministers" and in whom we see His hands at work, in support of His people.

In the ability of the school world to know how to reinvent itself in totally new ways, in order to treasure the relationship with and between children and their possibility to understand and give meaning to this time, in their lives.



JESUITS

Euro-Mediterranean Province of the Society of Jesus
Albania - Italy - Malta - Romania

In the efforts of the institutions, of the armed forces and police, of the scientific community, of the world of communication to play their role in a choral and responsible way, at the service of the country and the life of citizens.

In the self-sacrifice of millions of workers who, willingly and dutifully, are carrying on the primary services made available to us.

In the creativity that associations and many individual citizens have developed, in order to support, help, and be present to the most fragile and in need of our society, whom are most affected by isolation and by social services discontinued.

And, finally, in our Church and in our works that have never ceased to do everything possible to continue to serve and work for the Kingdom, finding the most appropriate forms, in the given circumstances, to be present and close to those in need. The people of God have found themselves, from one day to the next, with no opportunity to celebrate sacraments, to gather and meet, to participate in the prayer life of their community. And yet, we all witness the creativity, the willingness and the great desire to experience the presence of the Lord in listening to the Word of God, in participating "virtually" in the Eucharist, and in the texts and videos that have animated our chats and social networks, during these weeks.

In all this, signs of the new life, the new time and the new land, promised in walking through the desert, are already revealed. But we cannot be naive and abandon ourselves to an easy optimism that could lead us to believe that we can expect magically a more just and resolved world, just as we must not be blind to the signs of the promise that are already revealed to us.

All this touches and concerns us also, as an apostolic body. We know, in fact, that this time of unexpected isolation has given us an unusual experience for our way of life. We have had to set on a side a life of physical encounters, of apostolic dynamism that led us to be on the move, to gather, to plan and, often, to rush. This experience of isolation has led us to *re-enter into ourselves*, as we have been taught in the Spiritual Exercises. We have had to cancel and postpone many of our activities and commitments. We suddenly have found ourselves with a lot of time available and a lot less things to do. We have experienced both boredom and emptiness in those spaces that normally saw us just passing by and with our diaries full, and, at the same time, we have closely got in touch with our poverty, with the fragility of our projects, with the illusion of our security.

We have also had to *re-enter into our communities*, to a domestic life at home, with an ordinary, everyday life, that is not, necessarily, our own. We have, perhaps, found new occasions to pray together and our community celebrations have been given a new meaning, when we present at the altar the desire of so many people without the possibility of accessing the sacraments; and, in doing so together, we have been able to experience the meaning of the fraternity in the Lord, which is proper to our Institute.

In all this, we have, perhaps, also found, at this time, a life of prayer and spiritual reading that have been nourished by the need to entrust to God our worries and the many distant people. We have been able to enjoy the relief of being able to stop and look for His Presence, to look at our life and our consecration with His eyes, enabling our eyes to open with a renewed vision.

In this return to our roots, to the essentiality of our proceeding together, the words of Deuteronomy also resound to me: "Remember all the way that the Lord, your God, has made you walk, in these forty years, in the desert" (Deut 8:2). I believe that they correspond to and arise from a restlessness, that which generates, on the one hand, the surprise and the wonder of rediscovering, unintentionally, the simplest and deepest features of our



JESUITS

Euro-Mediterranean Province of the Society of Jesus
Albania - Italy - Malta - Romania

evangelical discipleship and, at the same time, the concern that this current experience may not leave a mark in our life, in our mission. We often preach and exhort others to remember the fruits and to learn from the crises that life brings with it, but with the words of Saint Paul we can ask ourselves: "Well, how is it that you, who teach others, do not teach yourself? (Rom 2:21).

While we are, certainly, still in the midst of the crisis and we are aware both of the pain and suffering of many, as well as of the generous commitment of many others, I also wonder how we can avoid, dear brothers, that this journey in the desert remains without some teaching for us? How can this Lenten desert, while it makes us advance towards a new time and a new land where we will enter, lead us also to convert our community life, our life of prayer, our very mission in the Church and in the world?

These are the desire and concern I wish to share with you, dear companions. This is the grace I ask for all of us and for our apostolic body: that the Spirit may guide us to identify the necessary steps so that all this journey, as according to the Gospel of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, may be accomplished in us and educate us, and "the works of God may be revealed" in us.

Fraternally, in Christ,

Fr. Gianfranco Matarazzo SJ