

CHALLENGES TO  
THE  
FAITH  
COMMUNITY

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May 2020

## **Covid 19: What could be the call of God for Catholics at this moment of history**

In recent times the corona virus has compelled humanity to rethink about life, culture and destiny. The world is not the same as a few months ago. It has challenged every area of human life. As a religious person, I would like to reflect on its challenges to the faith community.

First of all, for me, it is a terrible crown of thorns placed at the head of the wounded humanity. It made the so called 'super powers' tremble and be humbled. It made the intellectual world reevaluate its proud ongoing pursuits. It leads contemporary life to perplexity and despair. In spite of the power of money, the advanced countries are not able to overcome this mysterious enemy. In spite of academic advancements in the medical field, doctors and researchers are not able to find a vaccine to eliminate the virus. Despite tremendous progress in science and arts, society is not able to find any immediate solutions. Humanity is now humbling itself before the almighty power of God. Humans accept their limitedness before the infinite and surrender to the ultimate and seek directions and assistance.

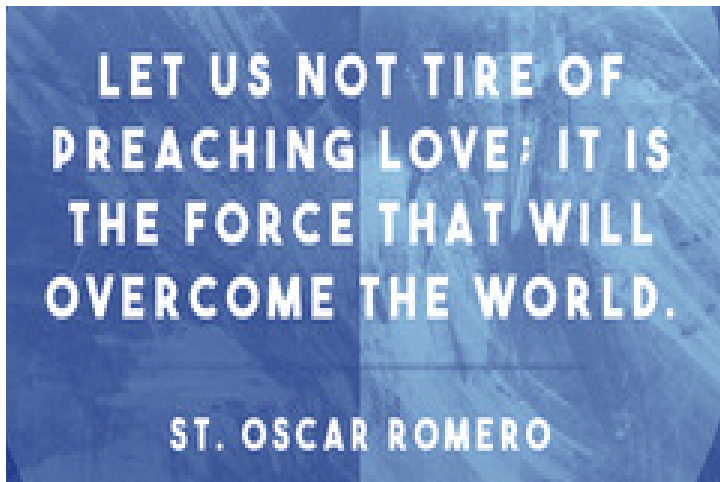
Furthermore, we see positive change in the lives of people in general. People have started to realize their interdependency more than any time in history. Even simplistic jobs are considered noble and dignified. Human solidarity has become the urgent need of the time. Health workers and cleaning people are highly respected now more than any time in history. Every human person is created for a purpose and all are needed for the promotion of life on earth. This is the realization that has come to people in this time.

The third reality is a change from exterior life to interior life. People were busy with superficial activities to prove themselves. Now, they feel the worth of being rather than doing. Life does not consist of mere activities. There is an interior world of silence, wonder and oneness with the realities of the world, harmony and belonging. One need not travel a long way to meet a friend to communicate his concern. One need not be a super activist to make his presence felt by others. The value of prayer, consciousness and solidarity in spirit are realized and valued more now than before.

My fourth observance is a change in life style. People are eating healthier food. They have time to cook at home and avoid junk food available in the market. Eating has become an art rather than consumption. Physical exercise has become a time of self realization rather than mere physical enhancement. Yoga, techniques of breathing and creative and joyful exercises replace the routine and mechanical work outs. Unnecessary alcoholic drinks have been reduced. One of my priest friends made a beautiful observation. Usually, he used to do at least one funeral per week in his busy parish. Now, after the pandemic, that has been reduced to one per month. People find self help medicines instead of going to hospitals for everything. Working at home reduced the unnecessary tensions of rushing, traveling and stressful employer to employee relationships. Family life is enhanced during this time. Entertainment also takes new shape. People who have spent lavishly in the past are now determined to follow the minimalism principles of doing the best from what they have. Talent shows have become social activates to express the concern and hope for others. Creativities like music, art and wisdom have become part of human promotion of life and compassion.

My fifth observance is the reality of social distancing. That has helped people to respect the space between them and others with dignity. People become responsible in keeping social consciousness. They walk in the streets with social responsibilities. They have learned to respect the individual rights of others in more deliberate ways. Love and affection can be expressed in different ways.

Everyone can wonder at the gradual changes that are taking place in the consumer society at large. There are regrets regarding very important moments of death, sickness and intimate sharing of life. But, humans have learned to live with difficulties that are beyond their control. Humanity has invented a new way of life out of necessity. In this situation, as a person of faith, I have to go the Bible in discerning the message of the God for us today.



## **1. Creative Work of God**

God is the creator of the universe and He is the cause of life. Nothing can go beyond His control. But, His creative work has to be seen differently in the light of the Bible. His creation is an ongoing process. He brings new life from chaos. It is true, God has created this world out of nothing. But, the work of God is not over by just creating the world once upon a time. He recreates a new world every time out of chaos, from sin to holiness; from confusion to order; from old humanity to new humanity. God never distances himself from the destructive elements of human life. In those moments, God's presence is very intimate to humanity. He is creating the world in a new way.

The first parents disobeyed God and created contempt towards them. God did not abandon them. He presented ways and means to recreate life. When the people of Israel were in slavery, He liberated them with a mighty hand and made them a nation. He sent his only son to redeem humanity from destruction and chaos. The new life given by the Spirit of the Lord is an ongoing process that makes creation new every time. This is the story of salvation that we read in Scriptures.

There were world wars in the recent past. The causes of these wars are human selfishness. But, God did not stand far off and watch the chaos of human beings. People of faith noticed the hand of God in redeeming people during these tragedies. After each world war, human society underwent a tremendous change. People became envisioned

to see the world in new perspectives and develop a new kind of relationship with the rest of humanity. The hand of God worked through so many good people who dedicated themselves to the welfare of humanity. Now, we have another world war. It is not between nations. It is between human life and a virus, the invisible enemy. It has created a terrible situation in the world that no one imagined. Some people warned governments regarding this. But, no one took it as seriously as now. It could have been prevented to a large extent. But it is beyond limits.

At the same time, no one has a right to blame others for this virus. It would be like Adam blaming Eve for the original sin. America can not blame China; Hindus can not blame Muslims; Politicians can not blame scientists and laboratory people. Corona has no territory, language or creed. The whole of humanity has to face the evil with faith and courage. Our God is creating a new world out of chaos. He sent a flood in Noah's time to create a new humanity. It was not to destroy humanity completely. Noah's ark became a symbol of hope. Likewise, He is creating the world in a new way in this time of crisis. He is making use of us as instruments of the new earth.

There are examples of God's creative power in today's history. In this new humanity, there will be no rich and poor; no caste and creed; no superior and inferior and no domination and submission. It would be a kingdom of God intended by Jesus in the gospel. We do not know the real work of God. One has to be open to the work of God in human life.

## **2. Redemption is a new journey**

The God of the Bible is the God of redemption. He redeems people, not only from sin, but also from all dehumanizing realities. But, every redemptive work of God is a journey. It is a journey toward wholeness, the overall development of body and soul. God leads people to unknown. What type of healing does God want to bring to humanity in this context of the corona virus?

When will we end this shut down? When shall the normal life start? Politicians could make some compromise and instruct people to live with the virus. They do not care for the individual person. Their concern is their political life in the world. God is not a political leader. He is the one who wants to totally redeem humanity from this danger. He will not make a compromise between health and economics. His solution is not just a medical solution. It is the conversion of humans to His kingdom on earth. Everyone, affected by the virus or not, has to take a journey of redemption. It may be from exteriority to interiority; or riches to solidarity with the poor. It may be superiority to humility. Everyone has to take a journey with great faith in the God of redemption.

For example, let us take the situation of migrant workers in India. Even though, the government promises to provide minimum facilities for their livelihood, these families want to go back to their native villages by all means. They take risk of their very life. They think that their safety is in their villages rather than the promises of the politicians.

What is true life? Freedom or Economy? Their journey is different now. Once they migrated from villages to huge cities. Now, they journey toward the place where they could feel at home.

Jesus as the redeemer initiated a journey from death to life in everyone who believes in Him. This journey is to overcome sin that causes death. In this epidemic, humanity has to join together to fight against evil. It is not merely finding a solution to the virus. It is the journey to make the world home for all. It is to fight against poverty, injustice, racial discrimination, the dangerous journey of illegal immigrants, arms race and things that destroy the environment and the purity of nature.

Ultimately, it is a journey toward God who is the author of human life. God has a purpose for humanity. Everyone has to journey towards his or her own purpose in life. Seeking God is a journey of the soul. In history, there are different models that indicate this journey. Francis of Assisi had a journey from riches to poverty; Francis Xavier had a journey in taking the gospel to the unknown at the time of reformation. Mother Theresa had a journey from secure convent life to the streets of the poor in Kolkata. In every journey, Jesus is coming with us to deliver us from the forces of death to the freedom of life.

In this time of Corona, God initiates a journey in every human being. Churches are closed; the worship of God has taken a new form in families. Schools are closed and a new type of learning has emerged at home. When are we going to return to



normal life? This is not the right question. What will be a normal life? That is the right question.

Everyone astonishingly noticed the service of health workers and doctors in serving the people in this time. There was a nurse who voluntarily went to New York to help the patients and died of the virus. There were doctors who took risks in treating the victims and died. They participate in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus in redeeming life. In India, one doctor who became the victim of the virus was not even given a burial ground by the people. What is the meaning of these sacrifices?

These people bring eternity to human life. Redemption is not something that is related to time. It is something that is related to the quality of life, a meaningful life in every moment.



#### **4. Role of Organized Religions**

The role of religions is vital in this situation. They should lead people from rituality to spirituality. Catholic Bishops suspended obligations of Holy Mass, Confessions and other sacraments in this time of the Corona virus. They did not want people to get it during the time of sacramental celebrations. But, rituals are not the only thing in religion. There are ways and means to lead people to spirituality. Instead of streaming Mass, the leaders of the church should have given people a different spirituality that brings God to consciousness in the heart of the people. Instead of asking people to turn toward churches, churches should have gone to the people by way of values, projecting different ways of life according to the direction of the gospels.

During the time of persecution, people did not build Churches; rather they spread out among the people preaching the good news of salvation. There are creative ways of Evangelization in the time of pandemic. In this time, I really appreciate priests and nuns in different parts of India. They went in search of the poor. They shared their life with them by distributing food, comforting the dying and strengthening the poor with the message of love.

I appreciate the teachers in America in a special way. They have found creative ways to reach their students. Online education of the kids is very much needed at this time. Many teachers are doing wonderful work in this regard. There are some catholic parishes in which pastors reach out to people in their own way. It is a rewarding ministry for priests and people.

## **5. Spiritual Communion through Social media**

I am not speaking here about live stream Masses and worship arranged by the Church leaders. I would like to focus on the prayer communion of people themselves. There are new groups that have emerged at this time who are concerned about the prayer life of families. They broadcast live to people so they can pray together and share their prayer and spiritual support through media. Rosaries and stations of the cross are organized by people themselves in this time of crisis. This is the new beginning of seeing the church in a different perspective. It is not to minimize the role of clergy in the church. Their role grows stronger in this time. Sharing spiritual music and songs through media is an effective way of strengthening one another in Spirit.

The role of the Holy Spirit is strong in this time of epidemic. It gives a different way to reach God who is the ultimate goal of human life. For example, I find new meaning to my priestly life in this time of crisis. I could pray more and attend to people individually, by sharing life with suffering humanity. Each Christian expresses one's longing for God in a profound creative way. People have learned to live life with minimum comforts. It is the spirit that leads us in a wonderful way during this time for a life with God and life for God.

## **6. A Life in Harmony with Nature**

For me, the corona virus is a sign of nature's revenge on human life. Humans terribly abused nature in recent years. Nature is a companion who walks with human life. We have to be grateful to nature for its gifts that enhance human life. Nature glorifies God in silence. A life in harmony with nature is the way of joining nature in its great dance of joy. Atomic explosions, air pollution and noisy dominations of humans create hurt in nature. In recent months, one can see wonders in nature. The sky becomes marvelous without pollution; birds sing beautifully without interruption; animals move freely in the streets and nature is blooming everywhere. Our first parents lived in harmony with nature at first. The earth was a paradise and animals were friendly to humans. Because of greed, jealousy and sin of the humans, nature became an enemy to human life. The same thing is happening in a different way today. A life in harmony with nature has to be discerned. Saints like Francis of Assisi give inspiration for a grace filled life with nature. Pro-life is also a part of life in harmony with nature. Revival of monastic traditions in the Catholic Church is also a call today. From noise to silence is a great spirituality that has to be developed.

### **Conclusion**

Fear and panic prevail everywhere at this time. Scientists and experts are predicting more deaths, more despair and destruction. As people of faith, our role in society is much needed more than before. We are the people who could bring hope to humanity. We could do more creative things to spread the message of hope. Our Lord never wants us to be victims of the pandemic, but, wants us to be victorious. We are Easter people. Our song this time has to be a song of victory. We have a special call this time. Let us respond to it. Let us be music makers and dreamers of a dream. God is longing to establish His Kingdom through us.

## **Christ Our Light!**

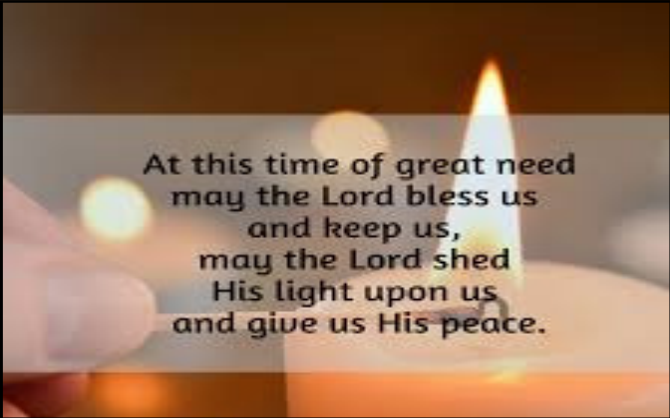
Your light rises in our darkness and assures us  
that you are present with us  
and that your powerful closeness to us transforms  
our fear into hope.

May we join with our Holy Father, Francis, in  
spreading a "contagion" of  
hope "from heart to heart".

Protect all your selfless servants who continue to  
serve the needs of the  
most vulnerable by both hands and heart.

Give our elected leaders wisdom of heart in  
decision-making that the  
common good of our human family may be  
achieved and the gift of each  
person's human dignity respected.

May the new Easter fire of love, energy and  
resilience burn within our  
hearts so that we may give witness to the mystery  
of your resurrected life  
among us and within us. Amen



At this time of great need  
may the Lord bless us  
and keep us,  
may the Lord shed  
His light upon us  
and give us His peace.

***Inspired by and adapted from the Prayer of Saint Francis***

Lord, make me an instrument of your healing:  
where there is disappointment in a test or procedure,  
make me into a comfort;  
where there is confusion at a diagnosis or treatment,  
make me into clarity;  
where there is illness of any kind,  
make me into care and comfort;  
where there is anguish in death, make me into hope;  
where there is joy in new life,  
let me be a multiplier of that joy;

O Great Physician, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be served as to serve  
to be praised as to praise  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in healing that we are healed,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.

