

“I...vow to God ...”

Rome, 25th March 2020

*To all the sisters of charity.
To each and every one of them, wherever she is in this moment.*

Dearest sister!

The Vows in this March 2020, which you are about to confirm, have a special “taste”. A taste of temporariness, of trial and surprise. What is happening? Which whirlwind has sucked the world? And together with the world, even humanity? ... Sure, humanity as a whole, but even the humanity present in you.

Up to a month ago, you surely never dreamt what type of situation you will be living in. This “virus” which has no boundaries, nor political belonging or skin-colour, which has no passport, nor identity card and yet moves simply whenever you move ... this virus has already touched the ends of the world since it walks on the feet of a travelling, wayfaring and global humanity. It’s invisible and yet present; it’s infinitely small, but its equally infinite power has already invaded all the continents, all the countries and all the territories. In one word, it has become pandemic!

Humanity wakes up as if it were a dream and feels weak, helpless and highly surprised. For how long? How harmful will it be? Who will be hit?

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Lord, where are you in this dark hour?

In this via crucis, which many persons are experiencing with you, **yes, oh Lord, you are there!** As in the past, along the narrow roads of Jerusalem, today in the intensive therapy units and in the hospital wards, which have never been so overcrowded. **You are** in the houses, as well as in the streets, or just like here in Rome, under the bridges.

Isn’t there even one Veronica to wipe your face? ... Oh yes, there she is, that exhausted nurse - *Agostina on duty* - who is there ready while you pass by, or to put it better, while you make way towards that ward or that corridor, packed with beds and patients.

And not even a Cyrene - *a new Moscati of our days* – who could lift up, even for just a moment, that oxygen dispenser, to tell you at least: *“come on, you will make it”!!* ... Oh, yes, there he is, the doctor-Cyrene, no longer dedicating himself calmly to his patients in the usual wards, but struggling with the looming death, more than a soldier on the frontline.

And ironically, the Social media permit us to glimpse a new battlefield, a new way of making war, where the front-liners aren’t the soldiers who throw the weapons, but the doctors, the nurses, the assistants, the volunteers ... Relentlessly, against time and at times without protection. Alas, an arduous struggle. Sometimes one conquers; sometimes one succumbs.

And the true soldiers, could be found in the background, as it happened in the past with the Red Cross nurses who gathered the corpses for burial: silently, secretly and in solitude; that same solitude which remains always with you once you enter the hospital, as you burn bridges with your loved ones, your friends, your work, your dreams ... One, two, three ... 50 ... 100 ... 300 ... 600. Alas, always on the increase on a daily basis!

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This 25th March will no longer be as before.

Dearest sister, a new and more radical “yes” is required from you. History speaks a new language. The human days of our existence seem to assume the colours of the rainbow, on which we too willingly write “*Everything will be fine*”, but we equally know that even our generation will have to face the uphill towards Golgotha. Surely the ascent is difficult, hard, perhaps without return. But beneficial and advantageous because up there the horizon is more transparent. The Son of God illuminates the world’s darkness.

And we, who stand at his feet, like the women in tears but not desperate, have the permission to ask him the eternal question: “*Tell me, when will dawn arrive?*” It’s a scary question if you remain downhill, because from below you cannot guess how long the night will endure ; it assures you - *only* – from where you can glimpse the advancing day.

It’s the faith of the Church, born up there. That faith sprinkled with the mixture of “blood and water” (cf. Jn 19,34), gushing from the open side of the God-Man. He, who became one of us, wanted to traverse together with us and for us, the “human steps” through his life, suffering, death ... and resurrection. Human steps and daily steps. *Humanity is on a pilgrimage!*

And if he is now calling us to him from up there (cf. Jn 12,32), the reason is because he still wants to tell us words of love, consolation and proximity: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened*” (Mt 11,28). *Dearest sister*, these words are encouraging, especially in these pandemic days, where one cannot tell when the tunnel will end, but one knows that the light will be finally there. These words remain always new - *exceptionally new* - especially in this time of suffering and trial.

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It’s the time when the human heart longs afresh for God

And if the churches remain closed and deprived of rites and songs, we have the Social media, especially TV, the modern altar, from where Pope Francis, as if by magic, but simply through a “miracle” of technology, every morning appears to celebrate his Mass over the world, in apparent solitude, but in reality he has around him that “*global ecclesia*”, that “*multitude born on Easter*”, of whom *you, every man and every woman, you, religious community and families* make part , while we discover, in time of human tragedy, the beauty of praying together: the Mass, the Rosary, the Way of the Cross.

“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13,1)

My dearest sister, these words console us, because it means that He is with us in every moment; and he will always remain even beyond the end of this tragedy. When on the example of her Lord, humanity too will be able to utter *“it is finished”* (cf. Jn. 19,30), this will mark the paschal fulfilment. From Golgotha till the Alleluia song! Here lies our faith. Faith that ripens in history and is nourished through the Mystery.

The Word of God helps us. Let’s meditate it abundantly in these “Lenten” days marked by apparent passiveness, of self-quarantine prescribed by the norms, while we draw directly from the daily liturgy, which unfortunately we can only celebrate privately and without the Eucharist, not even in our chapels. Let’s draw the word of God even through the Fathers, from the rich well of the Office of the Readings, which perhaps on other days we brush against them just with our eyes or read them rapidly. Instead today, they nourish us, they sustain us and they accompany us.

Every death, every crucifix and every historic suffering have already been redeemed by that cross, on that hill, when, like a woman in labour, the Son of God cried (cf. Mk 15,34.37), as he committed his Spirit (cf. Lk 23,46), to donate it to the world.

Emerging Spirit, Bud of life, Creator and Re-creator, Spirit of Resurrection. And in these pandemic days: “most gentle relief”, “rest in weariness”, “shelter in heat”, “comfort in weeping”!

Spirit of the Son and of the Father, Friend and Companion of an always nomadic humanity; pilgrim by vocation; traveller by definition. A humanity always on the go: yesterday on the camels or carts, today on either real or virtual motors. Global humanity that moves everything along with her: property, culture, rights ... but even anxieties, yearnings, acquisitions and sometimes even bacteria and viruses.

Spirit of Consolation, who never abandon those who have been entrusted to you from the top of that “wood”, we are sure, You are still here, near us – *we are sure of it!* - in this curve of our time, in this year 2020, assailed (coincidentally, as in all the 20’s of the last centuries), by this subtle and obscure “crook” – *this global virus* – which is unfortunately trying to strip us, to rob us and to beat us while leaving the entire humanity “half dead” (cf. Lk 10,30b): at the human, spiritual, moral, psychological and economic level.

Luckily you are there, *Spirit who inhabit the heart of every man and woman, Spirit of the One who didn’t leave us orphans* (cf. Jn 14,18). And you now become visible in the Samaritan on duty, who doesn’t pass by indifferently and passively, but who with his oil and wine - perhaps wearing a protective mask or gloves and with disinfectants in his hands - stops on this roadside, within this time that consists of charitable moments and gestures.

Yes, you too, sister of charity, wherever you are...

whether down there at the ends of Asia or in the depths of Africa, whether beyond the Ocean in the Americas extended between the poles or here in Rome, in this continent of Europe which is pounded like the grain in the barnyard ... *You, sister of charity*, you surely remember, that through your baptism and through your charism, you are called *today more than ever*, to become charity.

You are not being called to meaningless heroism. Someone repeats to us that our time doesn't need heroes, but daily heralds of small gestures: attentive, creative and prudent. "*A glass of fresh water ... just a glass of fresh water*", Jeanne Antide¹, would say symbolically.

You know that if the corona virus became the "initial problem" of this time, you also know that even you, I, and all of us, could become in turn the "final problem" for the other, for those who are near us: it could be the other sister, the helpers, the personnel, the workers, the relatives, etc. In fact, both science and medicine, keep repeating to us that this deceitful and parasitic virus, prefers to travel anonymously than out in the open. Therefore, let's keep it in mind! If someone is taken to the Intensive Unit, beforehand, there is always the unconscious "asymptomatic carrier"; that is, he or she who is unaware of being the "drawbridge" for the utterly tiny crook.

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Thus here we are, somehow helpless and somehow creative

↳ *The first sign of charity*, consists in following the norms that we hear repeatedly, from morning till night. *Sister*, I think of our environments, especially in the big houses: dining room, chapel, community room, reception, yard... Let's always respect the rules, both those regarding the person (especially the hygiene) and those of social importance (especially the social distancing).

Frequent hand washing, thoroughly and deeply. Always keep that minimum social distancing, which is never less than one or one and a half meter ... Always ! Both when you eat and work; both when you walk and pray; both in the dining room as in the chapel ... Always! Both when you are in the lift as when you queue up in the chapel to receive holy communion. Fortunately, only in this way the virus fails to be a good bounder. It is hindered from being transmitted from you to the other, and from the other to you; just in case you or the other happen to be unconscious carriers.

My dearest sister, the norms are simply necessary to protect ourselves; they have as it were, an apostolic and missionary significance, in the sense that all of us must feel responsible of the others. And together we have to be so even towards those who live next to us or who have been entrusted to our care: «*Where is your brother Abel?*», asked God to Cain. «*Am I my brother's keeper?*» (cf . Gen 4,9) ... Yes, you are, I am, we are". Lovingly and with responsibility.

¹ "Preliminary Discourse", in LD: p. 158; Circ. 1808, in LD: p. 173; Rule. 1820

↳ *Other gestures of charity*, in this time, are surely being requested abundantly. There are so many around.

- Ah, I truly desire to recall those sisters who are sewing (*emergency and protective masks*) for their own area, for their collaborators and for those who will be needing them when they get out of stock. Who knows how many rolls of pure canvas could be found in our storages ... Especially in the big nursing homes or in the ex Italian Provincial houses. Material of strong, rough and resistant canvas ... We obviously have to invent “sewing machines for the occasion” (to make masks or other objects), while respecting always the conditions of the current laws.
- And I am so touched when I come to know about that small community, where a sister calls that “elderly woman” in the district who has remained sort of “imprisoned” on the fourth floor of an old building. *A word of comfort, a good morning nicely offered, a “rosary decade” in the afternoon, echoing directly on a mobile phone, etc... Charity is infinitely inventive!*

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Doing good properly!

Sure, *dear sister*, you can assume and sustain many charitable initiatives in this time of extreme emergency. Assume them with generosity, passion and love, in accordance with your sisters, without ever neglecting the rules. We must always be aware and remember the danger of this epidemic, because a gesture which you consider charitable could in reality increase the damage and the risks not only to others but even to yourself. St. Vincent said that good deeds must be accomplished properly!

Moreover, in this serious emergency, every local community knows how to discern in order to be useful and generous. Each one knows that our first act of charity must consist in being highly prudent and attentive to the rules established by our local governments, to avoid becoming personally a problem for the health structures which are already being challenged through the expanding of the epidemic.

Prevention, while respecting the norms scrupulously is the first form of charity which we are called to live in this situation.

↳ I would like to reserve a word regarding our contacts, as Congregation, with the Italian Civil protection.

- We have indicated some of our houses on the national territory, which are empty. If they can be of any help, ... they are there! [For ex. *Welcoming the Healthcare workers who live far from their Region. Times of quarantine. Storages for sanitary material. For post-hospitalisation. Etc.*]

- At the same time, we too are raising funds, drawing also from our small financial reserves that we collected for times of emergency, and even by asking for small free donations in order to contribute in the purchase of some lung ventilators, which the health structures badly need.

Those interested can contact the Thouret Foundation across the usual channels. At the end of the letter, you can find indications of the bank details.

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↪ And finally, I would like to recall that our Communications-Office, here at the General house, has taken the initiative to focus on a real “spiritual chain”, our martyr-nurse, Agostina, who personally experienced the transmission of tuberculosis within the open field of a hospital ward. Who else can suggest how to behave and for whom must we operate ... within this “Gethsemane” of our modern times? *You too, wherever you are, participate in the chain, dearest sister And if possible, indicate it to others: lay-friends, supporters, acquaintances. You are all welcome!*

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And God “became contagious” with humanity!

Dearest sister, as usual, even this year, you will confirm your belonging to God through the four Vows on the 25th March. It’s the spiritual appointment of the Congregation.

Let’s make ours Mary’s experience, who before standing at the feet of that cross, had promised God to stop in her womb, to be hosted in her innocence. And thus God became Man. And the divine “*is transmitted*” to the human; not like a virus, but through an act of infinite love, which introduced Eternity into time, the Word into history, the Son of God into man’s tent. And, always out of love, He became like us in everything. Except sin, precisely in everything : in our tears, joy, suffering, hunger, thirst, fear ... even death.

That contagion didn’t cause death, but life, salvation and happiness. Let’s remember it today, in this time of contaminations and manipulations, of defects and instability; of genetic mutations and unnatural changes from a living species to the other, from one habitat to the other, from a species to the other. In the beginning God made **everything** beautiful and good (cf. Gen 1-2). Today, man needs to return to that primordial innocence. This pandemic strongly reminds us of it! The Incarnation is its sure path.

And Mary guides us. Especially with her *innocent and pure* gaze, who didn’t withdraw in front of the impossible - “*I am a virgin*” - but she opened herself up to the impossible which became possible : since you are a virgin, “*you will conceive and give birth to a son ... I am the Lord’s servant!*”.

Dearest sister, Mary’s unconditional “fiat” - “a fiat, regardless of” - is a model for us. Let’s recall it especially today when we are dominated by fear, while anxiety assails our spirit and when faith suggests to us to surrender ourselves to God.

He can do everything, he can extinguish every epidemic, and humanity could once more triumph like many other times in its history. But we are called to pronounce our “Fiat” strongly and serenely. Not to state our defeat, our giving up or our loss, but to continue to build within us “*the new man*” emerging from Easter (cf. Eph 2,15; 4,24).

With the certitude that after this bitter experience, which will doubtlessly leave on the field victims and solitude, humanity will manage to set up afresh her norms of justice; to re-write her rules of living together; to revise her lifestyle; to re-discover her filial relationship with a Creation that has become an orphan of the same harmony which its Creator had given to her and which we have dissipated, destroyed and wiped out during the last centuries.

And I am sure that we will never forget how it all started. Or better, how everything came to an end, as of only two or three months ago, from that Chinese city Wuhan, where that virus “*ended up*”. That confused and crazy virus, which like many other viruses in other eras, leaked from the confinement which mother earth had contained and perhaps imprisoned for millennia of years in the depths of a forest. Due to many ecological problems, forests have lost their equilibrium and power. This virus would then have settled on a winged animal (a bat?) whose organism offered it a dwelling and nourishment for long centuries, (*but please excuse the insignificance of the description*).

We believed that everything would end there. That everything had been resolved in that “utterly long quarantine” which seemed to you excessive, exaggerated, rigid, where we witnessed the confinement of millions of Chinese people. Instead, that was only the beginning.

Dear sister, allow me please to end this long letter by dedicating the last thought to Italy, and especially to the Northern Regions, Lombardy in the first place, where the number of scared people is always on the increase (And I even know that while I am writing to you, other “breeding grounds” are ravaging elsewhere. In Spain for example).

Oh Lord, what do you want from these lands, which in these days resemble you more in your scourging experience in Pilate’s court than in your victory over death? The ravaging pandemic. It seems almost beyond control. The tunnel is still long ...

*Mary, woman of sorrow, mother under the cross, accompany your numerous sons and daughters, in the Regions of Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia ... but even in Spain, Korea, France, England, Germany, America, Iran ... **of the whole world**, who continue to die and all those who although still alive, yet they carry in their heart the wound of their dear lost ones. Among these, there are already some of our sisters’ families.*

Dear sister, best wishes for the 25th March. To all of you sisters! Starting from the most elderly sisters, who are surely experiencing the incertitude of the present moment, while remaining strongly grounded in the experience of steadfast faith and life-giving hope.

Let's confirm our Vows, as we nurture the attitude of the Magnificat and dedicate in community, times of prayer-together (respecting the social distancing). Times to listen to the Word of God and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Briefly, times of trust and expectation. Of optimism and hope.

In this moment, the world needs saving prayer more than ever. *And with Mather, who after having learned it directly from her son's lips and shared it with the believers of the first communities especially in the time of trial, let's pray together and teach how to pray:*

Padre Nostro ... Notre Père ... Our Father ... Padre Nuestro ... Abana ... Missierna ...
 Tatăl Nostru ... Eh Hamare Bap ... Abuna ... Lay Cha Chung Con ... Bapa Kami ... Ati Ynë ...
 Pai Nosso ... Paralokathilirukkira enkal pithave ... O Phra Bi Da Khongkha Pha Chiaothanlai ...
 ... Wo men de Tina fu ...

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**With sr Christine, sr M. Silvia, sr M. Rosa, sr Mary,
 Your travelling companion and sister, awaiting the morning.**

Sr Nunzia SoC

REFERENCES FOR EVENTUAL DONATIONS

FONDAZIONE THOURET ONLUS
 via della Greca 11 00186 ROMA
 tel 06.57170845 - Fax 06.5780331
www.fondazionethouret.org

Reason for payment: Emergency- Coronavirus

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Banca Popolare di Sondrio - Agenzia 33 Roma
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