

Be hearths of hope and of light

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Rome (Italy). The Mother General of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians sent a message for this particular time of Lent due to the *Coronavirus*. The invitation of Mother Yvonne Reungoat is that of praying the Novena to Mary Help of Christians, to do small, daily gestures of fraternal charity, to strengthen fraternal communion, to have trust, and to be hearths of hope and of light.

“Dearest Sisters,

My heart feels the need to reach all of you in every part of the world with this message. In communion with the universal Church, we have entered into the Lenten season. It is a strong time of prayer, of fasting, of conversion, of love for our neighbor expressed in daily life. Jesus invites us to follow Him on the journey of the Passion to arrive with Him to the Resurrection.

The Passion of Jesus is lived today in the many persons who suffer, in many peoples who, because of violence, war, poverty that is more and more widespread, lack of respect for human dignity, but who are the face of the suffering Jesus.

The difficult situations are often not communicated well and clearly on the Social Networks. As Daughters of Mary Help of Christians we are witnesses that they exist and we live them with our people. This is why we feel in solidarity and bring into our prayer our sisters and brothers, especially those who have no voice, the poorest, the forgotten, the excluded. We unite our voice to that of Pope Francis who always remembers the marginalized, the excluded of society and prays for them.

In this very complex historical time, we are living an unprecedented international emergency provoked by the spread of the *corona virus*. I do not have an exhaustive knowledge of the vastness of the epidemic, also because it changes day by day. However, we know that it has spread throughout the whole world. The cases of contagion have quickly multiplied and it is a situation that worries us. I do all that is possible to keep informed about the Countries in which we are present. We are experiencing fragility and vulnerability when we thought that we could resolve everything without God. This event changes something in the life of the world, even if right now we cannot foresee all the consequences. These must be faced with courage and creativity at all levels of responsibility.

We live this situation with great trust in God who is Father, Teacher, and Lord of life. At the same time, also with responsibility regarding the people we meet along the way. In his regard, I wish to share with you some considerations that I deem opportune to face, in the best way possible, this very delicate time.

The abundance of news spread through the media generates different feelings in us. On the one hand, it assures us that through scientific research, the interventions of many professional people are prepared to face this virus, even putting their life at risk. On the other hand, this can lead us to unwarranted interpretations that induce panic, uncertainty, counter-productive states of mind. In the face of this reality, we are invited to react with responsibility to avoid alarmism that would further damage us.

We commit ourselves to observe the provisions emanated from Institutions and experts in this field, observing suggestions that are indicated to take care of, not only our health, but also that of many other people. I think that this is a concrete way of giving our contribution and

avoiding that the contagion extends even more. It is also a sign of solidarity towards those who, with much sacrifice, are giving the best of themselves according to their possibilities and competence to contain the spread of the virus, and face this emergency positively.

We Christians and consecrated persons are asked for something more. We must intensify our prayers to the Father, Lord of history, so that He will help us all with His grace, and the entire Human Family to live this time with mature faith, with hope, and with openness to solidarity. It is the hour for the greatest trust in the presence of God and in the powerful intervention of Mary, Mother and Helper of each of her daughters and sons present in the whole world.

For this reason, I invite you to pray the novena of Mary Help of Christians so that this emergency may be eradicated. I know that various communities have already begun to do this with faith and I thank you from my heart. This too is a way to feel close to the people who are suffering due to the virus and for their families, as well as be close to the thousands of refugees who are waiting to be welcomed in these days and find only rejection and violence.

Don Bosco suggested praying to Our Lady in 'difficult times' with this Novena, "If you want to obtain graces from the Holy Virgin, make a novena" (MB IX 289). With the means available, propose this to the young people you are in contact with and other people, so that a network of incessant prayer will be formed to reach the heart of God.

Permit me to invite you to unite to prayer, small daily gestures of fraternal charity. They are very precious because they are lived in the 'secret' of your heart, where only God sees, and thus they will be the irradiation of the good, channels of hope, light in the darkness. Even if we are invited to be prudent, solidarity on our part and on the part of the young towards those who are in need is always a sign of God's Presence, who in His Love never abandons His People who are suffering.

When we find ourselves in situations of having to remain 'at home' at the request of the civil and Church authorities, we can strengthen our fraternal communion and find the joy of being together in the gratuity of presence, simply content to have time to share what we have at heart. It is an opportunity to discover one of the charismatic values: rejoice together, relax, and rediscover the simplicity of good relationships, which we all need. It is a value that due to the complexity of life and frenetic work, we run the risk of losing. Especially at this time, it helps us to strengthen our faith and our hope, to be generous in humanity, and to rediscover the beauty of solidarity towards those who are in need.

In some places, due to ministerial decisions, the schools and universities are closed and activities that reach the children and young people are not authorized. Even religious celebrations are prohibited. I thank the communities for the creativity they are developing to reach the young *online*, so that the educational and spiritual accompaniment they need will not be lacking. New ways are opening up and we see that in difficulties, creativity develops.

I encourage you to not be crushed by the new challenges, but to face them with the apostolic passion of the *Da mihi animas cetera tolle*. Fear paralyzes, trust multiplies energy and makes us able to risk even to the point of giving our life. May our communities be hearths of hope and of light!

May Mary Help of Christians help us and accompany us to live this time of Lent in Resurrection light.

Rome, 11 March 2020

**Superior General of the FMA Institute
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