

The Coronavirus from the Perspective of Providence: A Call To Creative Love

José Granados, Superior General of the Disciples of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary

These days of Lent we reread the departure of Israel from Egypt, when God delivered the Israelites from the scourge of the plagues. The scene takes on a new life in the face of the epidemic we are experiencing. It reminds us that God is no stranger to anything that happens to us. "My destiny is in your hands." (Ps 31:16). Whoever lives from faith in the Creator, lives trusting that everything comes from the Creator, and therefore lives the coronavirus through faith in the Divine Providence of God.

Why the coronavirus, what are its causes and effects? The scientist or the doctor, and the psychologist or the economist, can talk to us about it. But only faith gives us the ultimate view that unifies the partial gazes. The believer does not have all the answers, but he knows Who does. He knows Him and knows how to invoke Him, so that He can help us to live this hour with meaning. *Believing in God means that our "why?" can be transformed into "what for"?*

"In the program of the Kingdom of God," St. John Paul II said, "suffering is present in the world to provoke love, to give birth to works of love of neighbor" (*Salvifici Doloris* 30). The suffering caused by this virus is present *in order to* revive love within us. It is towards this love that Providence leads all things. That is why those who believe in Providence do not respond with negligence or irresponsibility, but with the intelligence of love.

We awaken to love, *first*, because we discover how valuable our relationships are based on the body. This realization arises because the virus is a threat to our common life. Because of it, we are afraid to be together, to act together, we isolate ourselves... Thus, the virus deeply wounds us at heart, in our human heart, which is called to communion. But by contrast, we learn at the same time, the great good that is threatened. For we experience that we have no life if it is not life together. That we cannot flourish as solitary individuals, but only as members of a family, a school, a neighborhood... The virus unmasks the lie of individualism and testifies to the beauty of the common good.

The reawakening of love continues, *secondly*, because we suffer as our own the suffering and anguish of others. Pain unites us. In a way, we have all been infected by the virus, because our community, city, nation has been infected. Hard times are coming for many families, for the elderly, for the most vulnerable. The suffering of this pain will increase among us the works of love for others. The difficulty of physical contact will require an intelligent love, which will invent new forms of presence. Technological means will help us to express that closeness and affective support which, far from spreading the virus, vaccinates us against it.

Waking up to love will also be, *in the third place*, the recognition of new ways of working together. For the pain of the virus, in addition to that caused by the physical disease, will be the pain of anxiety, of not knowing what to expect or how to get on with the thousand things of daily life. It will be the fatigue of making plans and of having once again to endure waiting. And the intelligent and creative love will be that of the teachers who do not interrupt their educational work or support for their students, of the parents who invent chores and games for their children, of the pastors who continue to bring nourishment to their faithful, of the families who inspire and share their creativity with other families.

Finally, this creativity of love will make us discover that love has an inexhaustible source. And so, *fourthly*, our suffering will awaken us to love if we turn our gaze to God, the source and channel of all love. The forced isolation caused by the virus can help us expand and deepen the great question of the "what for" of everything. The virus, by threatening the breath of life we breathe, and the presence of those we love, invites us to ask ourselves the ultimate secret of this breath of life and love. What is its origin and destiny? And the question will lead us to discover the face of God who has responded to suffering, not with a theory, but with a Presence: by suffering with us. For He has become flesh, infecting Himself with our pain in order to heal it. And, in the Sacraments of His Body and Blood, He has healed us.

It is precisely in this time that access to the Sacraments, especially to the Eucharist, can become difficult. Let us remember, therefore, that God's grace continues to work, even when we cannot go to Communion. For at every Mass said by a priest, even if he is alone, we will all be present, and God's grace will touch us. Faith in Providence will arouse an intelligent love so that the Eucharist will continue to be prolonged in our lives. We will be able to strengthen prayer in common, the reading aloud of the word of God, the familiar prayer of Lauds or Vespers on Sunday, the invocation of Mary in the Rosary...

It is possible, and it is already happening in Italy, that many will have to live this Lent fasting from the Eucharist. It will be a saving sorrow if it awakens in us a true and lasting love for the Living Bread that comes down from heaven. It will be a saving sorrow if it teaches us that, deprived of the Eucharist, medicine of immortality, we cannot live. This is true because in the Eucharist we have the risen body of Christ, immune to any virus, an inexhaustible source of our common life. Thus, the threat of the virus will awaken in us, together with the concrete love for the sufferer, the hope for complete love that never ends. Thus, the supplication of the psalm will resound: "You shall not fear the pestilence that roams in darkness, nor the plague that ravages at noon (...) because you have the Lord for refuge and have made the Most High your stronghold" (Ps 91:5-6.9).

Nothing escapes from the providence of God, and God counts with our prudence (which is the intelligence of love) in order to face the epidemic, helping each other with generosity and creativity.