

Rome, 9 March 2020

Dear Schoenstatt Family in Italy:

During this time of Lent, we are all worried by the epidemiological emergency situation. Since the first news broke, we have had mixed emotions: indifference, confusion, doubt, distrust and suspicion of the media, concerns, fear, irony...

Without a doubt, as a Schoenstatt Family, we have been moved, firstly, by the suffering of the many sick people and the commitment of the many health workers who are fighting the coronavirus, and we want to form a true prayer chain for Italy and the entire world. We want to bring light to these situations with our spirituality, and therefore I am proposing a small spiritual contribution that you can meditate on.

Fr. Kentenich teaches us to enter into a dialogue with the things that are happening around us. Firstly, he calls us to empathize with those who are being tested. Sometimes, we simply have to accompany, in silence (cf. Job 2:13): he used to say that "love is presence." Then, he invites us to find the meaning and significance that are hidden in the pages of history. We can transform each difficulty and suffering into an opportunity to learn and, in this way, our hearts become larger and wiser. His method of Practical Faith in Divine Providence (that is, an active faith and always in search) has four moments. 1) **Listen** to what is happening, 2) **Compare** this situation with some of the moments in the lives of Jesus, Mary or the Church, 3) **Meet** the Lord and the Blessed Mother in calm prayer, and speak with them, listen to their suggestions and attentiveness in our hearts, 4) **Respond** to the Lord of History with our decisions and actions. (1)

In doing this exercise, two words touched me: **solidarity and creativity**.

Solidarity

1. I received this message on WhatsApp: "This is an opportunity to transform an emergency into a path of solidarity. Let us change our way of seeing and thinking. Instead of saying "I'm afraid of contamination" or "I don't care about contagion," I become the **one** who protects the **other**. I am concerned for you, I keep my distance from you. I wash my hands for you I give up this trip for you. I will not go to the concert for you. I will not go to the shopping mall for you. For you. For you who are in the intensive care unit. For you who are elderly and fragile, but whose life has as much value as mine. For you who are fighting cancer and cannot fight this as well."

Let us return to the simple exercise of the capital of grace! Each small or large effort and sacrifice we make to respect the security measures is a conscious decision: In this way, I'm taking care of you.

2. Of course, we should not forget those who are alone and the elderly. A phone call to encourage them or a small help is in itself a great Lenten gesture. We are attentive and let us look further than our own square meter. Let us look to our neighbors, our family members who are far away. Today, on the feast day of St. Frances of Rome, we want to learn from her sense of social awareness and ask for her powerful intercession.

Creativity

1. Fr. Kantenich never lost heart during a challenge. Instead, he was able to draw deep resources from his interior life. For example, in the hell of the concentration camp in Dachau, the life current of the Garden of Mary was born (2) Each of us should make a great effort and think: how do I want to live this Lenten desert period? I share an email from a dear friend who provided spiritual meaning to the current situation: "For my Lenten fast this year, I thought about no longer going to Mass until Easter so that I can more fully live my way in the desert as a widow, a strong path of Desire on his part (my husband) that in the desert there is a desire for Him, God, as in the experience of Israel and Jesus himself. The Church, with its strong sense of civic duty and respect for the civilian state, has done well to abide with the decision. Now it is up to us, as believers, to discover what the Lord wants to tell us with the "sacrifice" and the living bread that he gives us everyday."
2. Therefore, in this time when community liturgical celebrations (especially the suffering of not receiving the sacrament of communion) and meetings have been suspended, our religion takes on a more domestic nature. Let us strengthen our faith in our Home Shrines "(3) where the Blessed Mother has established herself to unite the family and give us the same graces that she offers in the daughter shrines (4). I repeat: The same graces! This is the test of our interior life We ourselves need to manage our daily and weekly prayer in a more conscious way. Let this be a more family-based and intimate Lent. Let us take greater advantage of the grace before lunch and dinner, greeting the Lord in the morning and at night. There many social media sites to follow the masses and various prayers. Let us especially develop the desire for spiritual communion (5) in a way we have never done before. In difficulty, we will not give up. We will not become discouraged. Instead, let us develop all of our spiritual creativity. As Christians, our lives are not different from the rest of the world. We do not have fewer difficulties in our daily lives and we do not suffer less than others. Christians have a different "way" of seeing and experiencing reality. We know that the heavenly Father, who "feeds the birds of the sky and clothes the flowers of the field" guides the life of each man and woman with even more care. He has our back, especially in time of suffering. Therefore, Christians can pass through the fire of challenges with an attitude of the disciple

who uses everything as an opportunity to learn. A disciple of Jesus, a son of Mary, does not fear pain and radiates peace wherever he goes.

How beautiful it would be if the Schoenstatt Family in Italy could be united during this time in praying the Rosary and making contributions to the Capital of Grace, asking for the Blessed Mother's protection. Let us pray especially for those who are working on the front lines of the national health emergency.

During this time of Lent, I will go as a pilgrim to the Shrine to pray for each of you, for your families, for your loved ones. May the Lord bless you and the Mary, our Mother, protect you!

Fr. Facundo Bernabei
Schoenstatt Father
Movement Director for Schoenstatt in Italy

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- (1) This way of meditating is a practical way of living "nothing without You, nothing without us."
 - (2) The Garden of Mary is a life current that developed when Fr. Kentenich was imprisoned by the Gestapo. In a letter dialogue with a Sister of Mary he proposed a challenge: "My dear little Mariengard" I shall grant your wish when your heart and the heart of our entire family has become a blossoming Garden of Mary. So the answer to your request for the 'Miracle of the Holy Night' is placed in your hands and hands of Schoenstatt children. Hurry, or you may be too late. Actually, I have great plans, and I need your father for them." Transforming a heart into a Garden means filling it with flowers for the Blessed Mother, clearing it of all the weeds that suffocate it.
 - (3) My home is your shrine, where I act for the glory of the Father. There, he transforms my entire being into the Trinity's most beloved shrine, where the sanctuary light burns and the glow of love never dies; where the fire of sacrifice upon sacrifice banishes all selfishness from the heart; where the roses adorn the altar and lilies never cease to bloom; where paradisaal breezes waft and raise heart and mind to heaven; where the spirit of the world cannot enter as in the eternal city of Sion; where peace reigns and happiness laughs because God's angel keeps diligent watch; where Christ rules and is triumphant and leads the whole world to the Father.
 - (4) Your shrine radiates in our time with the brightness and the magnificence of Tabor's sun. There where the light of Christ shines and celebrates the victory like time spent on Tabor: It is wonderful to be there, like in Paradise, because the Holy Spirit has established itself there.
 - (5) My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things and desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you are already there and I unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you.
 - (6) Mt 6, 25-34