

St. Francis & St. Clare of Assisi Parish

Fr. Francesco's Letter of April 1, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

How are you doing? I hope you are all well and safe, along with your loved ones.

This is the third letter that I write you to keep in touch with you: the "third letter of Br Francesco to the Haligonians". I start to feel like St. Paul!

Let us gather together in prayer in front of our loving Father Who is in Heaven, and let us give thanks to Him for the Mystery of our Salvation and for each and every gift that every day we receive from His goodness.

We are going through a strange time: a time of uncertainty, worry and sadness, especially for those who are sick, for those who lost their jobs or who risk to lose it, and for those who have been taken by the angels to be with God. They are all in our hearts and in our prayers.

This is also a time that unites the whole world, not just in the challenge of suffering and concern, but more than that, in Faith, Hope and Love. Faith in God Who is our Father and Who knows what are the difficulties that we are going through, and Who is always with us; Hope that this sickness will be defeated with the help of many generous and courageous people, and that soon we will be together again; Love that makes miracles possible, especially the miracle of loving and caring for each other, when we are in need.

We are called to be patient and responsible, keeping ourselves, our loved ones and everybody else safe. I understand that we are asked a lot, renouncing to go freely wherever we want, to gather with the people we love, and to come to Church to celebrate Mass.

I wouldn't be surprised if we would start to feel a little bit of discomfort. Yet I want to reiterate my gratitude for all the measures that have been implemented by the government and by our Archbishop. Many people are getting sick in Canada, but so far the spreading of the virus is limited. As I am writing you, only 127 cases have been diagnosed here in Nova Scotia. This is nothing compared to what is happening in Italy or in the USA, especially in New York. I ask the Lord that He may be at their side as they are facing this terrible test, along with all the other countries in the world affected by the virus.

Looking at what could happen, I believe that we need to be grateful, and that we have to keep praying and to be strong to fulfill what we have been asked, for the sake of everybody's health, especially now that we are approaching Easter and that we won't be able to celebrate together Holy Week.

To help us with this, the Archbishop is organizing to have the Easter celebrations on the Internet. I will make sure to let you know how to connect with him as he celebrates the most important liturgy of the year. I will participate in that, connecting with him online and I hope that many of us will do the same.

For those who won't be able to connect via Internet, I will offer mass at the convent with the other Franciscan brothers, asking God to bless and protect us all.

And so, let us lift a prayer to our Father, asking Him that He may look with Mercy upon us, and in a special way upon our brothers and sisters who are sick, who are dying and who already passed.

God Almighty, Loving and Most Tender Father, surround with Your Love all our brother and sisters who are in need of You in this moment. Send Your Holy Angels to be at their side to protect them from suffering and doubt. Draw all of us close to Your Son Jesus Christ and makes us one with Him, that we may embrace Your Love and Your Will, and be granted Salvation and Eternal Life!

In this past Sunday the liturgy brought to our attention a prophetic page of the Gospel, which related the raising of Lazarus from the dead, a man, friend of Jesus Christ, who was sick and who died because of that sickness.

In a beautiful dialogue between Jesus and His disciples, we heard some astonishing words: "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

Jesus was a friend of Lazarus, and of his sisters, Martha and Mary. When He heard that Lazarus was sick, He went to visit Him. An interesting detail of the story indicates that Jesus acted like He would wait until the passing of His friend before going. The reason of that decision wasn't easy to understand for the disciples in the first moment, but then it became clear that it was the opportunity for the revelation of the power of Christ over death. As His disciples witnessed Lazarus coming out of his tomb, they saw the Glory of God at work in that great miracle. Many others began to believe in Christ because of what they saw that day.

For me a beautiful part of this page is the expression of Faith of the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Both of them in fact declared with the same passionate words: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". Even more beautiful is the different way that Jesus related with the two. With Martha, Jesus spoke in terms of Faith, revealing Himself as "the Resurrection and the Life". With Mary, Jesus expressed His feelings, being greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. And then He wept.

It is amazing to read about how Jesus was moved by the death of His friend Lazarus and by the suffering of Martha and Mary. It's even more amazing, considering that He, the Son of God,

knew what was happening and the reason why (the revelation of His Glory). Jesus also knew that the Father always listens to His prayers, as He called His friend out of the tomb.

This is a wonderful page of the Gospel that allows us to have a glimpse of the mysterious way that the divinity and the humanity of Christ are united, express fully themselves and interact within Himself. What a great Mystery!

Making a comparison with the reality that we, human beings, live today, I do believe that something similar happens within ourselves as we are facing all the challenges of our time. Our human heart cries out for the suffering for what is taking place, but in the same time the Holy Spirit, Which we received in Baptism and dwells within our souls, gives us Faith and Hope, making us able to look at everything that is happening, and to accept it as God's Will at work for our Salvation and the Salvation of all.

This can appear as a contradiction not easy to accept. But exactly the contradiction that we carry within ourselves is one of the most beautiful aspects of our humanity: the presence of natural and supernatural gifts, of light and darkness, of love and egoism... We are always on the edge of choosing what is right or what is wrong. A very little and gentle breeze can make us fall on one side or the other.

The only way I find in my life to make sense of this mystery, it is surrendering to God's Love, letting myself go into the arms of the Father, and resting in the embrace of the Cross on which I am crucified.

Here is a great challenge for us Christians in these days: In what way do we look at what is happening? Do I see a punishment for our sins or do I see the mysterious unfolding of God's Mystery? Do I hear the words of Christ: "I am the Resurrection and the Life"? Do I believe that humanity is going through the Mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ? In this past Sunday's liturgy we also heard the Lord saying through the words of the prophet Ezekiel: "I will let my spirit enter within you and you will live again".

Let's open our hearts and let us make space for God's Spirit to come with great abundance, so that we may contemplate the Presence of God within ourselves, and within our brothers and sisters, especially those who are sick.

Let us keep praying for God's Blessing and for the grace to accept His Will, as it is always aimed at our Salvation.

Please, be safe and strong in caring for your health and the health of all.

May the Lord give you peace,
Fr Francesco