

CORONAVIRUS AND US

Let's go to church; Jesus is waiting for us

ECCLESIA

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**Costanza
Signorelli**



We have been deprived of everything: the Eucharist, the Holy Mass, Confession, and every public devotion normally practiced during Lent. Making the present situation even more difficult, the current epidemic makes us feel like beggars more than ever. And so if you go into a church today to pray during the *Coronavirus Emergency*, you will find that is an experience like no other.

The flow of so much tragic news impels us also to think of so many desolate churches, imagining how empty, bare and abandoned they all are. Truly, anyone who goes to visit the House of God during this time will immediately notice a surprising grace: the Presence of the Lord is so near that it seems tangible. And if it is true that silence and the emptiness of souls meet each other, they seem surreal: the more you enter into silence, the more you are attracted and drawn into a relationship with the Essential.

If we enter into a church today, can we possibly say that God is absent? On the contrary, it is as if the tragedy of having everything taken away has reduced our relationship with the Lord to a heart-to-heart conversation and has made even more evident to man the truth of Christ's promise of Love: *"I am with you always, even until the end of the world* (Mt 28:20).

Therefore, it would be no exaggeration to say that it is by visiting the house of the Lord that we can receive within ourselves the power of the Spirit, capable of transforming this time of trial into a time of grace, or at least into an occasion of true conversion. So much so that crossing the threshold of the holy place becomes for the believer the most awaited appointment of the day and the moment that everything else revolves around.

Many people are saying that "You can also pray at home" and yes, this is always a pleasant invitation for Christians. But at the same time, you cannot make them believe that the presence of Jesus Christ in his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in all the tabernacles of the world is just the same as his absence. In short, it is precisely the saving and sanctifying presence of the Eucharistic Jesus that is the essential core of our faith, even if today we are being forced to fast from him and his presence in the Mass has been hidden. Thus, it is always good to pray at home, as in any other place; it is always good to pray by day and by night; but to physically set out to go to the house of the Lord remains, objectively, something of a different order.

This is all the more important to understand the stronger the pressure exerted to

close churches - or discourage their attendance - in the face of advancing coronavirus. As what is happening in Italy shows, where churches - although formally open almost everywhere - are completely empty.

If during this Coronavirus emergency the *ratio* for every restrictive provision of individual liberties means eliminating any contact between people in order to prevent the spread of infection, then we must ask: what place could be safer than one which offers no possibility of running into a group of people because it is, in fact, empty?

In order to find evidence to support our position, we drove around and visited a sampling of churches in Milan and its environs, a city with one of the highest population densities in Italy. Here is what these churches look like during these days:

CHURCHES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS: PHOTOGALLERY

We are confident that what you have seen in these photographs can easily be replicated in many cities in other nations: the churches are empty. Therefore it is clear that there is no rational basis that justifies such an intervention restricting or limiting the faithful from entering places of worship and everything that follows from it.

Instead the opposite is true: going to visit the Lord, in his House, is an experience of faith that must be defended and encouraged today more than ever. In fact, if all of the health precautions are responsibly respected (go out only if you have no symptoms, wearing a mask, and maintaining a distance of one meter from other people), there is no reason to be afraid or to be deprived of so great a thing.

It is being said repeatedly that, in this difficult moment, everyone should think responsibly of the good of others. Well, what greater gift can Christians make than going to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament to implore peace and salvation for the benefit to the whole world? Only by going to the house of *He who can do all things* will we be able to see with our own eyes that there is no fear that cannot be transformed into hope when we are held in the arms of God. And even the worst curse can be transformed into a blessing that offers the path of salvation for every person. And so take courage: let's go to church, Jesus is waiting for us!