

COVID-19

“Look up” to escape the crisis

CREATION

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“My people are slow to convert: they are called to look up, but no one knows how to raise his eyes.” The sorrow of God as expressed by Hosea (chapter 11) becomes a terrible judgment on the period of crisis we are presently living through. God speaks in the first person and describes his love for Israel, all the things He has done to draw them to himself: “But the more I called them, the more they turned away from me.”

The most concerning thing about this whole time of crisis is people’s inability to interpret what is happening in the light of the love of God who is calling us to Himself, who is asking for our conversion for our own good. He desires that we renounce our idols in order to embrace the Truth, which alone can make us free and happy. Instead, we continue to serve idols and thus we follow the path of ruin.

This is a snapshot of the historical period we are living through. A virus is putting the whole world on its knees, an unknown virus about which – at least at the beginning – very little was known and for which there is no known cure. It was a sudden and unexpected event, and thus it was able to create fear, insecurity, and uncertainty. Its impact became devastating, however, thanks to the irrational responses to it that came first of all from the “experts” and politicians, who in turn created economic and social consequences that had a far more devastating effect than the pandemic itself. The crisis went, and continues to go, from “it’s nothing,” to “it’s the end of the world,” with attitudes and decisions that, in one case after another, appear to be irrational. Just look at what has happened in the past few days: there are people out in the streets shouting “The virus does not exist!” and at the same time there are those who continue to propose and impose restrictions worthy of a totalitarian regime even though the spread of the infection is minimal. As Chesterton would say, it is not reason that has been lost, what has been lost is everything except reason.

The virus should have been an immediate reminder of our limitations, of man’s illusion of being able to control everything. It should have caused a sudden awakening from modern man’s delusion of omnipotence, which today has come to the point of thinking that he has the power to decide who lives and who dies, as if he was God. It seemed like a virus that was made on purpose to push us to break out of this cage that forces us to always look down, to think of life only on the horizontal plane, to be consumed in today without thinking of tomorrow.

This pandemic is a very clear invitation to “look up.” As has happened many times in history, it should have seemed obvious to turn to God, to ask forgiveness and turn to Him with all our heart: processions, penances, Masses, a real change of life. Surely there

were some who did this, for which the pandemic was a salutary slap that made them open their eyes to the meaning of life.

But collectively, as a people, we have seen and are still seeing the exact opposite. The streets have been emptied, while our days have been full of scientists and experts (whether real or only presumed) who have filled us with information that goes from one opposite extreme to the other, but is always passed off as the definitive truth. The Church has also sensationally disappeared: churches are perhaps open but we are advised against visiting them, Mass was first forbidden and now it is permitted only with many serious restrictions, the Church has voluntarily submitted herself to taking orders from a technical-scientific committee of doubtful competence. It seems to be the scene of the calamity described by the prophet Jeremiah: “Even the prophet and the priest are wandering around the country and do not know what to do” (Jer 14).

Instead of looking up, instead of looking towards God, instead of asking for the grace of conversion, we have seen the crisis being used to reinforce all the plans that previously existed: the techno-scientists call for more science, every politician declares forcefully that the solution is to vote for his or her own party, ecologists say that the lesson we should learn is that we need to have a different relationship with nature (in the ecological sense of the term), abortionists profit from the crisis by using it to ask for more abortions, and those who support euthanasia have taken advantage of the crisis to carry on with their work. In other words: instead of recognizing their idols for what they are and abandoning them, they are attaching to them even more strongly. Instead of stopping the murder of the innocents, they are continuing with even more intensity.

People are placing their hope in a vaccine, in a political system, in the recognition of certain rights, in economic availability.

“No one knows how to look up” is a sentence. Beyond the medical-scientific questions, which also must be faced and resolved, we have not understood the deeper sense of what is happening, of the true call from God that this whole crisis represents.

And the most dramatic aspect is that even the Church seems to have been swallowed up by this darkness that has come over the whole earth. We have seen frightened shepherds abandoning their sheep, shepherds saying that the solution is “ecological conversion” instead of conversion to God, shepherds who have fallen prostrate before science and are calling for a vaccine. Not all of them, through the grace of God. But the general impression is that, apart from distributing a little food and clothing to those who need it most, the Church no longer has anything significant to say

– that is, as long as it is still around.

“No one knows how to look up.” It’s true, we are slow to convert, we are slow to understand, we prefer to trust in ourselves, we always hold on to the hope that we can escape through a therapy, a vaccine, some sort of political reform, and then we can place this drama behind us. But these are delusions.

If you don’t look up, you end up on the road that leads to ruin – you might think you have overcome the crisis, but only apparently. Remember the prophecy of Fatima, when the Blessed Mother announced to the shepherd children the imminent end of the First World War: “The war will end, but if they do not cease offending God, in the reign of Pius XI a worse war will begin.”

This is not a threat; it is the logical consequence of our obstinacy in sin and idolatry. And perhaps there is no era in which God has been more offended than this present one. “Looking up,” turning towards God, begging for the conversion of our heart, entrusting our life into the hands of Mary so that she may intercede for us with Christ – this is the only path we have that will really lead us out of this crisis.