DAILY COMPASS
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MADE FOR THE TRUTH

CORONAVIRUS

“Lord, it’s so hard; what do you want me to do? I will make a vow.”

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Every day there are new restrictions. Now you can’t even go for a walk in the park anymore. You have to stay near your home. Whether you live in the city or in the mountains, whether you are going to meet 200 people in the park or only two deer and

a buzzard, it doesn't make any difference. You must stay at home, period. Until just a short time ago, we were told that walking in the fresh air was good for the immune system, and even more so if the outside temperatures are low; they call it Nordic-walking. Then they told us that a sedentary life has a negative impact on our natural defences and that protracted stress can increase the risk of contracting illnesses. But now it's "new orders, comrades."

It's obvious that we are at the mercy of fear and panic; it won't be surprising if they issue ordinances that forbid us to speak and order us to breathe sparingly. At the ecclesial level, the situation does not seem much better; here too fear predominates: fear of the virus, fear of ordinances, fear of the reaction of people who have been taken over by panic.

What can we say? We nod our heads, we smile, and we keep moving forward. There is a very significant episode in the life of Saint Benedict, in which the great patriarch of the Christian West appears a bit foolish. In the second book of the Dialogues of Saint Gregory the Great, in the 23rd chapter, tells the story of one of the annual visits that Benedict made to his sister Scholastica. She, desiring to continue to drink from the divine knowledge that she distilled from the lips of her brother, asked him to stay for the night in order to continue speaking of God. Saint Benedict, who did not want the monks to spend the night outside the monastery for any reason without a true necessity, refused. Saint Scholastica addressed herself directly to God, and her prayer was immediately heard: there was lightning and thunder and such a downpour of rain that Benedict was forced to stay with her. He reproved his sister for her impudent prayer. But Scholastica replied candidly, "Look, I asked you, but you did not want to listen to me. So I asked my Lord, and he answered me."

Look, we are trying to ask our government officials and pastors to have better judgment and not to prohibit what is good for the body and for the spirit, but we have not been listened to. Now we are being silenced as being irresponsible people who are placing others' lives at risk. So now we are turning directly to Him, to the Lord. And we are not doing this only with prayer, but above all with that supplication that is accomplished by changing our lives.

It must not be overlooked that God uses everything to call man to true conversion: to bring back those who are far away, to make the lukewarm fervent, to make those who already want to love Him and follow Him perfect. In this particular situation in which we now find ourselves around the clock, each one of us can and must try to understand the language of God and ask him with an open and humble heart: Lord,

what do you want me to do?

"Make vows to the Lord your God, and fulfill them" (Ps 76:12); making vows, as Saint Thomas explains very well (Summa Th. II-II, q. 88, a. 4), is beneficial, because it means promising things to the Lord that are good for us, for our soul. In a vow we do not add anything to God, but we dispose ourselves to offer him something that He awaits from us, for our own good. Because God does not want anything other than our conversion and sanctification. But how can we understand what is most pleasing to God?

It seems to me that in this situation the Lord has spoken in a most eloquent way: he has permitted a situation in which we are trapped at home, economic life and everything connected to entertainment is practically reduced to zero, and we no longer have the possibility of going to Mass and having a normal sacramental life. It is the way in which God speaks to us about His thirst for us, for our souls, for our time – the desire that he has to be with us, to lift us up to the things that are above.

All the places of entertainment and fun have been closed, places where it is very often the case that sins of every kind are consumed, places that for a long time have kept us far away from the silence and solitude in which God speaks. Let's make a vow to the Lord to reduce the time we waste in this way, or better yet to redirect that time, by spending it in prayer, in meditation, in family life, in healthy friendships.

On Sundays now almost all the stores are closed and nobody can even go to the park; how many times has Sunday been a day for us to go shopping, to entertain ourselves, or even to do more business? Let's decisively cut out of our lives those practices that have profaned the Lord's day, and let's make a vow to Him that, from now on, Sunday will be His day: a day dedicated to deepening our faith, a day of more intense prayer, a day to live a greater spirit of charity towards our loved ones and those in need. Let's cancel "the weekend" mentality and return to understanding and living Sunday as *dies Domini*.

We are deprived of Mass. But up until yesterday, what did the celebration of the Eucharist mean to us? We dedicated a column to denouncing the way in which both Masses and churches have become places and occasions to do everything other than offering worship to God. And now the Lord has said: "Enough." Now we are removing the iniquity from before His eyes, beginning with ourselves: all the times we have made excuses for not going to Sunday Mass, all the superficiality in the way we have participated at Mass, all those situations by which the Mass became empty and proud celebrations of ourselves, of our communities, of our social commitment, etc. So, we are

making vows: when the emergency finishes, we promise not only to go to Sunday Mass, but also to add some weekday Masses; and anyone who already does that should strive to go every day; and whoever already goes to daily Mass should promise to pay more attention to their preparation and thanksgiving before and after Mass. We are asking the Lord to restore the Holy Mass to us for what it truly is: His sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

God is calling us to conversion with a loud voice, and He is calling His people above all. Let's respond to His call, beginning right now: let's radically cut out all sin from our lives, let's shake off mediocrity, let's purify ourselves from worldliness and a superficial way of life. We sincerely propose, with determination and generosity, to change our lives, to give God more space. And once sin is removed, let's make vows. And God will listen to our prayer, above all if it is accompanied by tears of repentance.

And let's consecrate ourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, whom God has chosen as a refuge from every evil: our persons, our families, our nations, our parishes, our dioceses. We are praying that our bishops solemnly consecrate our beloved Italy to this blessed and Immaculate Heart – she who is seeking in every way to protect us, but who must always notice that we do not want to be under her maternal protection.

"Look, I asked you, and you did not want to listen to me. And so I asked my Lord, and he heard me." May this simple and strong faith obtain for us the grace we have long been waiting for. Let's turn off the television, let's not be constantly searching for more news and updates; let's pray instead with faith and lift our souls to the only One who can free us from every evil.