

Coronavirus and Human Brotherhood

Covid-19 can be defeated “by technical and clinical means” but only if combined with the effective anti-viral—“solidarity.” Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, expresses his closeness to those who are suffering, and to those fear the future because of the pandemic we are experiencing. He gives us a preview of the document entitled “Coronavirus-19 and Human Brotherhood” that the Academy is preparing in order to help us find meaning during this time where we are caught between worry and quarantine.

“An emergency like that of Covid-19 is overcome first of all with “anti-viral solidarity.” The technical and clinical means that can contain it must be combined with wide and deep cooperation for the common good, avoiding any tendency to favor special individuals on account of citizenship, income, politics, or age. Science must not yield to authoritarian or partisan pressure. It is called to ally itself with solidarity and with humanity. We live in times when no government, no society, no type of scientific community, can consider itself self-referential.

“While, on the one hand, there are signs of cooperation, on the other there are unfortunately signs of the opposite. How crucial it is for government decisions—I am thinking of Europe, but not only of Europe—to be made in a coordinated fashion! A unified decision-making body is needed urgently, it is indispensable. We felt as much with respect to the climate, but now much more is at stake than climate.

“There is one thing we must all keep in mind: The other person is my ally. Otherwise, community evaporates and I myself am lost. The other person is that person who stays one meter away as we are walking or when we greet each other. He does it to protect both me and himself. For my part, by staying at home and following the guidance of the health authorities, I act in support of the common good, so as to ensure that for all of us together, and as soon as possible, the emergency is over. Let’s be sure that we don’t forget the trials of these difficult weeks and the deeper meaning of the limitations on our freedoms: we are making this sacrifice for ourselves and for others.

“A communitary and fraternal understanding of humanity is a goal. It is not simply the result of an algorithm of interests and of a calculus of advantage. It requires a strengthening of society-wide concern and of mutual assistance. From its very beginning, Christianity has conceived of humanity as a universal brotherhood and interprets it as responsible closeness among all human beings.

“Today, however, we need to take an additional step: because we are all interconnected, our neighbor is not just someone who is physically close. The world is interconnected and the sooner we understand that, the sooner we will be a true global community gathered under the sign of brotherhood. The sacrifice we are making puts us on the path of solidarity and fraternity among all humans, without distinction.”

The challenge we are experiencing is crucial: we are at a crossroads in the history of humanity

and we must know how, even in our culture, to use our resilience to create epoch-making opportunities that will convince us, once and for all, that we need to abandon what is individualistic, inhospitable and affectionless in our relationships, whether those relationships be affective, economic, political, or institutional.

We must recognize that the modern empowerment of exclusively individual interest has gotten out of control. Born as a sacrosanct affirmation of the inviolable value of the person and the preeminence of his rights, it has ended up attacking and eroding the quality of those relationships that make community life good, that enrich the humanity of individuals and that eliminate the abandonment of the weak. This erosion has caused the duties arising from relationships to become fluid and evanescent. The quality of coexistence is an indivisible good—to benefit everyone, coexistence must be shared responsibly.

“In these dramatic days it is madness to think that the elderly should be selected for abandonment— but some are indeed talking about such a move. Human dignity has no age. I can’t forget that the first person Jesus cured miraculously was Peter's mother-in-law. He took her by the hand, healed her and she began to serve them.

“And what of the Church? For centuries the Church has spoken of the Eucharist as medicine (and not only of the soul). For seven years, Pope Francis has been speaking of the Church as a field hospital. Closing Churches would be like closing pharmacies and hospitals! Of course, the norms that have been established rules must be rigorously followed, even as to their timetables. Closing churches would be shocking, even for those who are not believers. Churches are the sign that heaven is open and not closed. And our cry to God, almost as if we are ordering Him, is powerful—*Deliver us from evil!*

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