



VERITATEM FACIENTES IN CARITATE

## INSTITUTUM CHRISTI REGIS SUMMI SACERDOTIS

Gricigliano  
April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020

Dear Friends of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest,

On the occasion of Holy Week, I wanted to assure you of the prayers of the community in these tragic hours and send you some news of our Institute, its priests, seminarians and sisters.

Because of measures taken by the Italian government shortly after the beginning of the health crisis, our Mother House and Seminary in Gricigliano entered into total confinement almost a month ago. Not being a parish, but rather a house of formation independent of our Florentine apostolate, we had to protect the many seminarians and priests in residence to enable them to continue their life of prayer and study. We therefore maintained the usual prayers and the choral office, to which we added supplications for your intentions, daily adoration and a weekly penitential procession within the enclosure of the Seminary to implore God's mercy.

The canons in our priories, churches, convents, missions, works and foundations across the world do their best to remain at your side, so precious are the comforts of the Holy Church in such moments. According to the restrictions imposed by civil or ecclesiastical laws, they try to give you the widest possible access to the treasures of the sacramental life.

It seems to me that an epidemic of such magnitude can be interpreted as a sign permitted by Heaven to bring us back to what is essential, as many commentators have pointed out. But what is essential? Is it not God Himself? In Sacred Scripture, God gives similar warnings to spark conversion. "A Jesus who agrees with everything and everyone," wrote Benedict XVI, "a Jesus without His holy anger, without the hardness of truth and true love, is not the true Jesus presented by Scripture but rather a miserable caricature. A conception of the Gospel in which the seriousness of God's anger no longer exists has nothing to do with the biblical Gospel" (J. Ratzinger, *To Look on Christ*).

Nowadays, we hear so little about the sins and offenses committed by man against God and which contemporary society has promoted on its own scale. Our Creator is hardly recognized any more as absolute Master of life and death. The experience of sickness and fear offers us a twofold lesson: the wealth and grandeur of our world are nothing but vanity since a microscopic virus sufficed to bring it to its knees; on the other hand, we must rediscover the meaning of the human condition, the love of the least, the most fragile, the most vulnerable, as well as the redemptive meaning of suffering. April 2 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Saint John Paul II, and, at the beginning of May, we will commemorate the centenary of his birth. What this Servant of God bequeathed to us as his

final testimony was an example of suffering transfigured by the love of the Redeemer, the exigencies of his apostolic mission and divine charity. In his encyclical letter *Salvifici Doloris*, dedicated to the meaning of suffering, he wrote:

Suffering is something which is *still wider* than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself. [...] The vastness and the many forms of moral suffering are certainly no less in number than the forms of physical suffering. [...] In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, [...] [w]e must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

On Good Friday, the Church will relive the great hours of her Savior's Passion and Death; may we unite to the sufferings of the divine Victim our own crosses, illnesses, loneliness, anguish, and the material and spiritual privations imposed on us by this long quarantine. Let us be convinced that God, so good, so loving, so merciful, "desire[s] not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live." (Ezekiel 33:11).

It seems to me that certain ecclesiastical authorities have too quickly and too easily decided to close churches and limit – or even suppress – access to the sacraments. How can such measures be envisaged when supermarkets and banks remain open? Is supernatural life of lesser value? Could it possibly be considered secondary? Does not the soul need to be regularly nourished, purified and supported, especially when subjected to countless trials? If one can consult one's doctor, with all necessary precautions, why can one not, with these same precautions see the priest, the true doctor of the soul? Could not the dispositions taken in supermarkets and other places furnishing basic necessities be implemented in our churches? We have the means to make our churches safe and sanitary, even rigorously so. The evangelists have shown us Christ's love for the unfortunate, especially for the sick, granting them physical remission as a simple pledge of spiritual healing: "Arise, go thy way; for thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke 17:19).

I heartily thank our canons who do what they can to help you and, through you, to serve Our Lord, by their visits or the broadcasting of liturgical services. With a major economic and human crisis now looming, we must face shortages of all kinds courageously. I know that in some houses of the Institute and convent of our sisters, we have already begun to distribute food and to help families in need. We will continue to develop and organize this much-needed charity. But convinced that "[n]ot in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4), we will also provide for spiritual needs, ensuring, without breaking any restrictions, the continuity of sacramental life. For we are well aware that the greatest danger threatening our society today is more spiritual than social or economic.

I wonder about the theology of a cleric who allows himself to forbid access to the sacraments while at the same time advocating better cooperation in the temporal sphere. No one would disagree that both the material and spiritual realms should be adapted to the context and scrupulously take the necessary precautions, but suppressing the ordinary channels of grace is never a good solution. Although access to the sacraments is not, strictly speaking, an absolute right, is it not nevertheless the priest's duty to facilitate their

administration and to take God to the most fragile, the most forsaken, the most unfortunate? Otherwise, what would be the meaning of his life of total and perpetual consecration and sacrifice?

I thank all our faithful for their unfailing support, reflected in your many messages, and our canons, sisters and seminarians for their dedication and prayers.

As Holy Week approaches, the climax of the liturgical cycle and center of Christian life, I unite myself to you all in prayer as I write to you from Gricigliano, where each of us will lovingly place your intentions at the foot of the Cross and to pray for the sick, the dying, the families suffering anguish or affliction, all those over the world who provide healthcare and whose heroism we salute as they persevere in the fulfilment of their duties. May God protect and bless them!

And you, dear faithful, unite your prayers to ours. I will send you some more news soon since the events the Institute had planned for the coming weeks will be cancelled or postponed. I invite you to invoke especially Our Lady of Pompeii, St. Roch and St. Sebastian, whose charitable intercession in times of epidemic has never failed. In Gricigliano there is a relic of the True Cross, surrounded by other relics of our patron saints and protectors.

I wish you a blessed Holy Week and encourage you to intensify your life of prayer in your homes with more frequent devotions. Keep hope in seeing Easter approach, for on this solemn day Jesus Christ shows us how, amidst the troubles and trials of life, He remains victor over death and sin.

*In Christo Rege,*



Msgr. Gilles Wach  
- Prior General -

