

RECORDED MESSAGE TO CONGREGATION RE CORONA VIRUS

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you from Rome by this special and personal mode of video communication. I hope that you are in good health and spirit. Both, our health and our spirit are important aspects to take care of in this worrying and anxious time when the whole world is in the grip of COVID-19, or what has become well known to everyone as the Corona Virus. As has been seen already, this virus has severely affected not only the health sector, but also the finance, business and social aspects of life. It is not to be treated lightly.

Firstly, I want to let you know that I am concerned about the well-being of each one of you and the citizens of your particular places, and I assure you that you are very much in my thoughts and prayers in this time.

As we know, the Corona Virus began and spread very quickly in some countries, and continues to do so, to the point of now being declared a global pandemic. Being a new virus strain, there is not yet a developed vaccine to treat this disease. All that can be done at the present time is to **unite in working together** to contain as best as we can the spread of the virus. For this, every person must take responsibility.

At the moment, **uniting in working together** is critical! Nations which have been already affected have collaborated with one another in sharing methods and experience which have proved to be helpful in slowing down the spread of the virus in new places. However, this 'working together' requires of every one to abide by some very stringent measures which has called for some unpleasant changes in our daily living, our ways of relating, our work, and also restrictions on our daily freedom to travel, to plan and organize events, even leisure. Nevertheless, it is vital that we all collaborate, cooperate and work together for the safety and good of ourselves and of others.

All this demands from us a sense of sacrifice with a strong desire for a hopeful future. We, Passionists, can find particular meaning in this time as we are in the process of journeying and identifying with Jesus in his Passion (Lent), through the sacrifice of his death on the Cross (Holy Week), to the hope of new life in the Resurrection (Easter). So, despite the fears and uncertainties in not knowing how long this grip of the COVID virus over us will last, I encourage you not to lose hope.

For us, Passionists, our hope is in the Passion and Cross of Jesus who gave his life in love for others. **Jesus is our Hope!**

Rather, what is important for us now is to listen and follow the orders and practices given to all citizens by their respective leaders and medical personnel: such as frequent washing of hands, keeping a distance from one another, cleaning and general hygiene, cancellation of group events, unnecessary travel and, when required, self-isolation. Of course, being who we are, we must not neglect our pastoral and spiritual commitments to those in our care. Where needed and possible, I urge you to avail yourself in offering the service of compassion, consolation and peace in ministry. All of this must be motivated by **concern for the other** which asks of each one of us to **accept and act with responsibility**. At the moment, life cannot be business-as-usual.

Finally, in this present situation, which is challenging our world, let us not forget to call on God's mercy and healing in our prayer for the world. In particular, let us pray for those who are ill with the virus and those doctors, nurses, medical personnel and hospital staff who risk their lives at the forefront of assisting the sick. We also remember those who are elderly, the poor and house-bound in their heightened fear and isolation at this time. Let us remember the refugees and displaced people in camps around the world who have no protection and are highly vulnerable. And we pray for the leaders of nations, that they may act responsibly and place all available national resources at the service of controlling and overcoming this virus. And may those who have died, rest in God's peace.

And with me, I ask you to call on the prayer of our Blessed Mother for the protection of her children:

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now in our need, and at the hour of our death. Amen."

'May the Passion of Jesus be always in our hearts.'

*~ Fr. Joachim Rego CP
Superior General
Rome, 14 March 2020*