

Catholic Church conveys message of comfort to the distressed amid COVID-19

Letter to those in distress..., during the feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

As the Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa we are concerned in a particular way for our many brothers and sisters who are experiencing stress at this time of lockdown. To defeat the pandemic and protect our neighbours we are physically cut off from consolation, companionship and joy.

We all go through times of distress in life; funerals, divorce, poor relationships, poverty, insecurity, financial breakdown, poor housing and hopelessness. Normally we can call on friends, sit with neighbours around a table, visit relatives, go shopping, visit a church and kneel before the Lord and on Sundays enjoy the companionship around the priest, the Word and the Eucharist. Isolated we feel our humanity is diminished. Deprived of social connections we find ourselves feeling helpless and incapacitated. Life is by-passing us. In the past we have been able to rise and respond to challenges but now we sit behind closed doors. One may feel of 'no use'

But no, we are 'of use', we are valuable in the very sight of God, our Father, valuable for ourselves. He has no one else unique like each one of us. God has never loves for our usefulness. God is love and He rejoices in our very existence. As a mother simply rejoices in the presence of her baby, so God rejoices in us. The child's smile and love is the mother's reward.

Locked inside we await. The agony of waiting now weighs heavily upon us. Our modern lifestyle does not appreciate waiting. But there are signs that waiting and hoping are productive of great fruits. The children of Abraham waited forty years in the desert to enter the Promised Land. Jesus lived hidden from the world as a carpenter in Nazareth for 30 years. Mary Magdalene waited outside the tomb and the disciples in the upper room. What came from this waiting in the time of God was the transformation of life.

At Fatima, today's feast, Mary requested the little children to pray and do penance. She showed that many were lost to God because they have no one to carry them in spirit, nobody to pray and do penance for them. We are inter-connected in a very deep way spiritually. Even now we can do wonderful things for others and for the world by our prayer and by enduring with faith the penance of helplessness.

We are woven into the body of Christ, we are not alone, and everywhere holy people are praying for us. Around the world devout children offer up prayers and sufferings, the old bearing their old age with faith are praying, the contemplative Nuns and

Brothers have dedicated their lives to pray for us, Mass is being offered every moment of the day uniting us in the Lord.

Our hearts go out to all who are depressed. We understand the fear. The Church sees each as infinitely precious. We are living branches of the Vine. He is intimately within for He cannot be locked out.

Arise! We remember the words of Pope; “Faith begins when we realise we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we flounder; we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives.

“Let us hand over our fears to him so that He can conquer them. Like the disciples in the storm in the lake we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God’s strength— turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies”.

Dear Brothers and Sisters the parishes are lonely for you, you are missed. We will meet again; He is risen, He is beside us. “God did not withhold His own Son but offered Him for us all. He gave us His Son, will He not also freely give us all things?” Rom 8 v32.

END

Archbishop W. Slattery OFM 13th May, 2020