



St. Patrick's Catholic Church

9 Fifth Street, La Rochelle, Johannesburg

"His big heart was sensitive to all human miseries"

Dear confreres,

Coronavirus infection continues to spread, and the World Health Organization has concluded that we are facing a pandemic. Many governments have taken strict provisions to restrict travel and thus reduce the chances of infection. Restrictions in many cases also include the suspension of pastoral activities, including the celebration of the Eucharist with the participation of people. (...)

As a congregation dedicated to the evangelization of the people involved in human mobility, the forced stop that we face cannot but be an opportunity for reflection and especially prayer. We remember that we are disciples of Blessed Scalabrini, who "in occasion of accidents of any kind was the first to intervene and bring comfort and help". We, on the other hand, must remain still, so as not to be a hazard to us and to others. Steady, but not inoperative.

The first thought goes to the people who are victims of the contagion, which causes so much suffering and even death, especially in those who are older and vulnerable. Let us make them present in our prayer, which must also include the medical and health care personnel who with such passion and sacrifice are dedicating themselves to their treatment.

A second thought goes to migrants and refugees, who are the protagonists of mobility, often forced mobility, for reasons of security and work. Many of them find themselves unable to reach their destination or return to their families. Like many others, they have to face this emergency, but often without having a system of protection behind them and without having a home to stay at home. Let us make sure that they too are present in our prayers. The deepest thoughts go out to all of you, confreres, scattered throughout all the continents. So far, we have had no news of confreres who have been infected and we pray that this will not happen.

Needless to say, we must follow the instructions given to us by those who are competent to act in these cases. Bishop Scalabrini also made the same recommendation when cholera threatened the diocese of Piacenza in 1884 and 1885: "The praiseworthy prescriptions adopted by those who are responsible for the public good, to which we urge you to correspond exactly, may help."

The immobility imposed on missionaries of human mobility must not, however, leave us immobile in our missionary yearning. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to increase our pastoral creativity, especially by using modern means of communication. I know that many among you have already taken steps in this direction and others are invited to do so. Stillness is also an opportunity to deepen our pastoral preparation, reading that book that has always remained closed or exchanging those reflections that we have left out. This immobility can also be an opportunity to strengthen our fraternal bonds in dialogue, to get to know one another better, to rediscover that fraternal life in common is truly a source of serenity, because we are "communities of faith and worship".

Let us pray that the Lord will soon free us from this pandemic and let us use this time to prepare ourselves to be more effective in our apostolate. May the Virgin whom we invoke as "Health of the Sick" be of help and protection to us.

In union of prayer and mission,
P. Leonir Chiarello, cs
Superior General