



**SOCIETAS DIVINI SALVATORIS
CURIA GENERALIZIA DEI SALVATORIANI**

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To all the members of the Society of the Divine Saviour

Dear confreres,

I send all of you a warm greeting from our Motherhouse in Rome. I write to you in an exceptional way during this Easter, in which we celebrate the central event of our faith, the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, our Saviour. In the very dynamics of the Easter liturgy we are invited to seek a more perfect closeness to Jesus, participating in his Passion, making ourselves part of his sufferings, contemplating - with our heads held high - the paradoxical mystery of the cross, so that with him we overcome the power of death and we can rejoice in his Resurrection, in which we can glimpse with hope our future.

Of course, it will not be a Holy Week like the other, which we have celebrated so many times. With the actual international health emergency, in many countries the liturgical celebrations of Holy Week take place without the physical presence of the faithful. But, I am sure that, precisely due to this new and unexpected situation, this time is endowed with a high intensity: it is an invitation to sink existentially into it, so that we allow ourselves to feel within us the beating heart of so many families whose compass indicates pain, crying and mourning for the death of their loved ones. Let us associate ourselves with the generous dedication of dozens of priests, religious men and women who died due to this cruel epidemic, taking upon their shoulders and actualising the unlimited donation of Jesus our Saviour on the cross. We look also at another disgusting detail: all of them were buried without farewells or funeral! In this

reality that is so harsh, in this profound abandonment and loneliness so desolate, we can cry out with the Lord when he felt so close to his own death: "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15.34; Mt 27.46).

In the midst of this turbulence, I would like to offer you some points of meditation – for personal use or in community - starting from some phrases of Pope Francis, which invite us not to be afraid in front of the adversities that we have to face today in times of the coronavirus. If we really want to celebrate Easter, the victory of Life over death, our first Easter testimony is to overcome fear when we face situations of death, not letting ourselves be dominated by them.

1. First of all, I want to thank all the confreres who are looking for ways to help people deal with this difficult time. I have seen beautiful and different forms of celebrations that thanks to modern technologies help the Church to be closer to the faithful and to people who suffer and are confined. I would like to congratulate those who have sought a word of encouragement and support in this time of crisis through prayerful reading of the Bible. Thank you also for the solidarity initiatives with messages addressed to doctors, religious and humanitarian personnel who risk their own lives to save the lives of others. *"Let us pray for them, for their families, and I thank God for the example of heroism that they give us by healing the sick"* (Pope Francis). We must face this time of crisis with the creativity that comes from love and listening to the Word. We cannot allow physical isolation to be justified as apostolic isolation!

2. Given the seriousness of the current global crisis, this is a time to grow in great unity. Here in Italy, a slogan: *"andrà tutto bene"* (i.e. everything will be fine) has been spread on social networks and by children's drawings. In this moment of darkness, let us also, as Salvatorians, be bearers of messages of hope founded on the humble but profound experience of being loved by God at all times and in all places. Above all in this situation that we are *"... in the same boat, all fragile and disoriented; but, at the same time, important and necessary, all called to row together, all in need of comforting each other"* (Pope Francis). Let us be persons who do a reading of this moment based on the values of the Gospel: the call to join our forces, to build bridges, to be sowers of hope in life, and to understand that no one is saved alone.

3. No one can predict how long this crisis will last nor what the consequences will be for the world. The world will surely no longer be the same. However, will something in our way of living change? Of course, we don't know the exact dimension of the impact of everything that can happen globally. However, what we have in our hands is our own possible change. We cannot go on like this *"... thinking of always staying healthy in a sick world."* (Pope Francis). This situation is one of discontinuity that requires us to grow in the capacity for discernment: to rethink deeply our way of living ad intra and ad extra, redefine priorities, grow in intimacy with

Jesus, evaluate the quality of our relationships with people and with things. Let us ask ourselves: are we, religious men and women, not also immersed in this sick and consumerist mentality, despite having professed the vow of evangelical poverty?

4. The coronavirus epidemic forces us to rethink also our strategic plan as the government of the Society. In this time of uncertainty there are important questions that ask us for the “... *gift of discernment and prayer to do it well.*” (Pope Francis) What will be the impact of the crisis on our apostolic works? And in the formation houses? Or in the new mission fields? What Society projects will we have to prioritize? And what are the works that we will have to interrupt or stop? At this time, we have no answer yet. However, with the consent of the General Council, I would like to inform you that the **5th session of the School of Formators**, scheduled for May 3 to 13 of the current year, **the meeting of the International Finance Commission** in Rome, scheduled for June 9 to 11 of this year and **the XV General Synod**, scheduled for July 20 to 30, 2020 in Timisoara **WILL BE POSTPONED**. From the Generalate we will continue to discern these and other changes necessary to straighten the future course of our Society.

5. In countries affected by the disease, the celebration of Holy Week will be lived by everyone from home. In other words, this year we will have to celebrate Holy Week internally in its most essential form, remembering the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus that continues in the passion and resurrection of humanity. Let us underline on this path, which we walk, that Life overcomes death. “*Jesus brings serenity in our storms because with God life never dies.*” (Pope Francis). May this message of salvation fill our hearts and restore hope in the midst of this trial that afflicts the world. I would like to remind you that the Easter Triduum shows us the extent to which the love of the Living and True God does not exhaust and saves everyone. Since we are discouraged to embrace each other or to shake hands due to the prudent demand to maintain physical distance, I invite you, when you give Easter greetings, to choose and sing together some song of paschal joy.

6. Furthermore, in these weeks I have thought many times about the words of the Gospel that speak of the “healing force” that came from Jesus. “A force came out of him that healed everyone.” (Lc 6.19 and Mc 5.30). Perhaps it is this healing force that we need in this hour of pain and concern for all, without exception. We Salvatorians, anointed by the force of the Spirit of Jesus the Saviour, are called to act in coherence with our vocation, that is, to radiate this forceful blessing that comes from the Spirit of God and that we receive from Jesus, the Risen One. This dark time, for us all, asks us to cultivate the capacity for reconstruction, because “*if evil is contagious, so is good. Let's allow ourselves to be infected by good and spread good!*” (Pope Francis). I would like to encourage you to reciprocal collaboration, to the sense of apostolic responsibility, without fear of assuming the spirit of sacrifice, which will be needed in so many places. Let us continue, without discouragement, steadfast in hope, even when

there is no longer reason for hope, because this is how our Founder also lived it: *"Whatever sufferings may come your way, always go ahead in the Lord!"* (DE II / 79)

Finally, I would like to end with the recommendation that we follow the preventive measures against the spread of the coronavirus, taking the situation of each country very seriously, in humble and responsible obedience for the common good. We can only get out of this situation together. Therefore, let us embrace the cross of this moment as a privileged occasion to activate other resources and possibilities that certainly would not exist in quiet times. I repeat, that social isolation as part of our responsibility for the common good is not a reason for apostolic isolation. Moved by saving love and animated by the desire that everyone always knows more deeply the Living and True God, may this be an auspicious hour to assume with force and firmness this apostolic call. God bless you! We are not alone in this testing time! Our joy is the Risen Christ who is alive and lives in us. Let us pray for one another, united in faith and for the same apostolic call!

With a fraternal greeting in the Risen Christ,


Fr. Milton Zonta
Superior General




Fr. Agustín Van Baelen
Secretary General