

## VATICAN SECRETARY OF STATE CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, calls for a commitment to international solidarity, and confirms the Church is close to those who are suffering because of the coronavirus. This crisis is affecting families, changing people's lives and causing serious repercussions even on the economic system. What can it teach us? We are experiencing a tragedy bound to have significant consequences on our lives. First of all, we are being confronted with our fragility and vulnerability. We realize that we are not creators, but poor creatures, who exist because Someone gives them life at every moment. We are not absolute masters either. All it takes is a mere nothing, a mysterious and invisible enemy, to make us suffer, to make us seriously ill, to make us die. We realize that we are small, insecure, helpless. We are also confronted with the essential, with what really matters. We are offered the possibility of rediscovering the value of family, friendship, interpersonal relationships, relationships that we normally neglect, solidarity, generosity, sharing, closeness in the concreteness of small things. We need one each other, communities and societies, to help us care for one another. Finally, I believe this is an opportune moment to return to God with all our hearts, as Pope Francis reminded us during the extraordinary moment of prayer on March 27th, and a few days earlier in the "ecumenical" Our Father, prayed together with all the world's Christians. How does Christian Faith help us interpret what is happening? Christian faith is God irrupting in human history. God who becomes flesh, God who comes to share everything about our existence except sin, and is willing to suffer and die to save us. We are preparing to celebrate Easter in this Lent which has been unique: Jesus rises, conquers death, gives life. Faith's outlook in these difficult times helps us to abandon ourselves more and more to God, to knock on His door with our incessant prayer that He may shorten this time of trial. It helps us to see all the good that surrounds us, and that is witnessed by many people. It is comforting to experience the pastoral creativity, already mentioned by Pope Francis, of bishops, priests, men and women religious, and the commitment of many lay people. They are the "voice" of the Gospel. So are all those (from doctors to nurses to volunteers) who are fighting the disease. I think it is good to see how the Church, which lives immersed in the reality of her people, seeks and finds a thousand ways, using all possible means, to ensure that people are not left alone, that they can pray and receive a comforting word. It struck me that, even in the current crisis, people are finding a way to express themselves for example through music and song in order to be together. I would like this to happen in some way in parishes too. It would be nice if all the churches could ring their bells for one minute at the same time, for example at noon; and that this sound might be a call to pray together, even given the physical distance. Masses and other liturgies including funerals have been suspended. Churches, however, are still open almost everywhere. What does this mean? What do you want to say to the faithful who cannot receive the sacraments? The suspension of celebrating the liturgy was necessary to avoid large gatherings. However, in almost every city, churches remain open. I hope those that may have been closed will reopen as soon as possible. Jesus is present there in the Eucharist; priests continue to pray and celebrate Holy Mass for the faithful who cannot participate there. It is nice to think that the doors to God's house remain open, just as the doors of our houses remain open, even though we are strongly encouraged not to go out except for essential reasons. The family is a domestic church. We can pray and prepare ourselves for Easter by following the liturgies and prayers on television. To the many members of the faithful who suffer because they cannot receive the Sacraments, I would like to say that I share their sorrow. But I would like to recall the possibility of making a spiritual communion, for example. Moreover, Pope Francis, through the Apostolic Penitentiary, granted the gift of special indulgences to the faithful, not only to those affected by Covid19, but also to health care providers, family members

and all those who care for them in various ways, including through prayer. In a vigil like this one, there is also another aspect that must be highlighted and reinforced. This is possible for everyone: to pray with the Word of God; to read, to contemplate, to welcome the Word who is coming. With His Word, God has filled the void that frightens us in these hours. God communicated Himself in Jesus, the complete and definitive Word. We must not simply fill time, but fill ourselves with the Word. Loneliness is one of the biggest challenges at this time. In the Covid19 wards people are dying alone, without the comfort of relatives who are barred from entering the intensive care units. How can the Church show she is close to people? This is one of the consequences of the epidemic that, in a certain sense, upsets me. I have read and heard dramatic and moving stories. When, unfortunately, a priest cannot be present at the bedside of a person who is dying, every baptized person can pray and bring comfort by virtue of the common priesthood received with the Sacrament of Baptism. It is beautiful and evangelical to think that at this difficult time, in some way, even the hands of doctors, nurses, health care providers, who every day comfort, heal or accompany the sick in their last moments, become the hands and words of all of us, of the Church, of the family that blesses, says goodbye, forgives and comforts. It is God's caress that heals and gives life, even eternal life.