

## Despair and Dreams: from Death to Life

**BERGAMO, Italy** - Fr. José MIZZOTTI, an Italian missionary in Peru, after his experience of being found positive with the COVID-19, shares some reflections of this moment of crisis... He does it simply, in the belief that life sometimes contains more contradictions and weakness of words.

### I'm in the dark and I think of you, coronavirus

A beautiful Italian song of the 80's said: *"I am in the dark and I think of you / I close my eyes and I think of you / I do not sleep and I think of you..."*. It had nothing to do with the coronavirus, but in the long nights when I was awake, first in the hospital and then in quarantine in the Montfortian community of Bergamo (Italy), I would have rolled over in my bed obsessed: *"I am in the dark and I think of you, coronavirus"*.

It was not what bothered me most physically, the recently operated knee for a prosthesis was much more painful, at least for a few moments: yet the head was there, with the coronavirus...



In the end, I had only a few lines of fever for two days, almost immediately after the knee surgery: no cough, no colds, no difficulty of breathing or other symptoms... But the result of the first swab had been relentless: positive and asymptomatic...

And there, I went back to experiencing something that I had already experienced on other occasions: feeling deeply in communion with the limits, weaknesses and impossibilities of my brothers, the poor of Lima... I had already experienced it in recent years, when economic aid from Italy or Europe was drastically reduced. Used to being able to do everything immediately, thanks to the financial support that came regularly and abundantly from groups of friends and solidarity organizations from Italy and Europe, little by little, like my brothers, the poor of my parish in Lima, I learned that it is not always possible to do everything immediately... Rather, you have to go slowly, you have to go little by little, you have to learn not to take the step longer than your leg... In short, from being rich in the service of the poor, I found out what it means to be poor with the poor... Exactly what I felt when the doctor, even almost happily, told me that the swab test had been positive, but asymptomatic... As if the asymptomatic could remove the gravity from the positive... Emptiness, fear, despair, without reassurance, without a future... it was what initially emerging inside me...

And there, concrete faces of my poor brothers from Lima appeared to me... And I remembered how many times they had entrusted me with their emptiness, their fears, their desperation, their feeling without security and without a future... And from time to time, a confused face appeared, of someone on the cross and His clear cry, too clear and heartbreaking: *"My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"*... And the deafening and terrifying silence that followed this cry... But a silence, full of friendly and supportive presence, nailed on the cross with the unknown one... the Father nailed with the Son and with all the children of all the times... I also felt accompanied like a son on that cross... But then, the emptiness, the fear, the despair,

without reassurance, without a future did not disappear... They continued... but I was not anymore alone... I was nailed to that cross with the Father, with the Son, with all the children... Redemption and saving solidarity... And when you are not alone, fear can even turn into a dream and emptiness can even turn into hope for a new world... Death can even turn into life... new life, more human, more caring, more fraternal...

### **Fear can even turn into a dream**

A little animal, small and invisible to the human eye, a tiny virus from nothing... managed to stop this world, launched in its mad self-destruction race without anyone finding the "Emergency stop" key... What an irony! And it forces us not to move and do nothing.

What will happen next? When will the world resume its march? So, when was the bad virus beaten? What will our life be like after?

After? Remembering what we have experienced in this long confinement, we will decide to stop working one day a week because we will have discovered how nice it is to quit. A long day to savor the time that passes and those around us. And we will call it Sunday.

After? Those of us who live under one roof will spend at least 3 evenings a week playing, talking, taking care of each other and also calling on grandparents who are on the other side of town or cousins who are far away. And we will call it Family.

After? We will write in the Constitution that we cannot buy everything, that we must make the difference between need and whim, between desire and greed. That a tree needs time to grow and that time is a good thing. That man has never been and will never be omnipotent and this limit, this fragility inscribed in the depths of his being is a blessing because it is the condition for the possibility of all love. And we will call it Wisdom.

After? We will applaud every day, not only the medical staffs at 12, but also the garbage collectors at 6, the postmen at 7, the bakers at 8, the bus drivers at 9, the housekeepers at 10 and so on. Yes, I wrote the rulers, because in this long journey, through the desert, we will have rediscovered the sense of public service, dedication and the common good. We will appreciate all those who, in one way or another, are at the service of their neighbor. And we will call it Gratitude.

After? We will decide not to get nervous in the waiting lines in front of the shops and take advantage of this moment to talk to people who, like us, are waiting for their turn. Because we will have rediscovered that time does not belong to us. That He who gave it to us did not make us pay and that definitely, no, time is not money. Time is a gift to be received and every minute a gift to be tasted. And we will call it Patience.

After? We can decide to transform all the groups of WhatsApp created between neighbors during this long test, into real groups, of shared meals, of exchanged news, of mutual help to go shopping or take the children to school. And we will call it Fraternity.

After? We will laugh when we think back to when we had fallen into the bondage of a financial machine that we had created ourselves, this despotic force that crushed human life and plundered the planet. So, we will put man at the center of everything because no life deserves to be sacrificed in the name of a system, whatever it is. And we will call it Justice.

After? We will remind ourselves that this virus has been transmitted between us without distinction of skin color, culture, economic level or religion. We all simply belong to the human species. Simply because we are human. From this we will have learned that, if we can transmit the worst, we can also transmit the best. Simply because we are human. And we will call it Humanity.

After? In our homes, in our families, there will be many empty chairs and we will cry for those who will not see this future. But what we have experienced will have been so painful and intense, at the same time that we will have discovered this link between us, this communion, stronger than the geographical distance. And we will know that this link that takes the game of space also requires the game of time. That this bond overcomes death. And this bond between us that unites this side and the other of the road, this side and the other of death, this side and the other of life, we will call it GOD.

After? It will be different from before, but to experience it, we have to go through the present. We must agree to this other death that is taken away from us, this death more exhausting than physical death. Because there is no resurrection without passion, nor life without going through death, nor true peace without having overcome one's hatred, nor joy without having gone through sadness. And to say this slow transformation of us that takes place at the heart of the trial, this gestation of ourselves, to say that, there is no word.

*Fr. José Mizzotti, SMM*