

Montfort_EurHope20: A Message of Hope from the Confreres in the Netherlands

NETHERLANDS - Last week, Fr. Peter Denneman, SMM sent a letter to all the confreres of the Dutch province that states:

We and all of the Netherlands have come to a halt. There is also little happening in the province. Therefore, I think it would be a good idea to have an extra number of Pro Nostris released just now. This time, not with all kinds of reports and messages, but mainly with experiences that we now have today. For example, this "Virus Pro Nostris" may contain:

- *your experience during this quiet time*
- *how do you expect to experience Holy Week and Easter now?*
- *a thought, a prayer, a consideration appropriate to this Corona era*
- *what could be a lesson from this pandemic?*

The result was 14 heart-warming reactions of the confreres, all in their own way and style. We brought out this special edition of *Pro Nostris* without the normal messages and reports. Just '*Pro Nostris*'; for us. We also put the meditation in this *Pro Nostris* that Pope Francis held on Friday, 27th March with the blessing *Urbi et Orbi*.

Three of our confreres share their current experiences:



Hope like a Crack

By Fr. Peter Denneman, SMM

*"Hope like a crack through which a ray of light from the future falls into the present." I took this sentence from the book *Not without Hope* by the Czech priest and theologian Tomáš Halík. In this book, he describes different forms of human hope and shows what it can offer, that is, when we encounter existential questions or profound experiences in life. The Corona virus does that to many of us. This is evident from what our colleagues shared with us in this special edition of *Pro Nostris*.*

In and around the flat where I live, it is quiet as if it was Sunday morning. Practically, no traffic on the otherwise busy Breda Road and no helicopters from the *Gilze-Rijen* air base in the air. It is very strange not to meet colleagues in *Vroenhof* and *Schimmert* for a few weeks now. Have a coffee at *Wiel* or *Simon*, but that's about it. For the rest, at home with a bike ride in the afternoon and a walk in the evening. Have daily telephone and mail contact with Marian and Servé for provincial affairs. All the time I have now is a book in which I had already started to read.

This time, I do not have to prepare the liturgy for Holy Week and Easter. The Trappistines, where I would lead, take care of the ceremonies themselves.... Let that take precedence... May we see this as *"a ray of light from the future in the present"*?

Rays of light from the future that fall in this age of "intelligent lockdown" are many. We can see the boundless commitment of employees in the hospitals and nursing homes and also in our two monasteries. They stand up for each other and offer services for free. Every day, we

read in the newspaper that *"everyone for themselves and God for all of us"* no longer typifies our society. All signs of hope? Would I like it or is it too good to be true?

In a week, we will celebrate Easter. The way of celebrating will be very different for many people than expected, at least for me. That doesn't detract from what Easter can do to us. I sincerely hope that you and I may come to believe in the resurrection, in the life-giving power of Jesus, even if it can be a difficult struggle at times. Jesus the Living. That is Him to you and me when the courage arises in us to act like Him and when the will arises to follow Him. The belief arises that death does not have the last word. Confidence arises that fear is not all-determining. Only then is He the Living One for us. The risen Lord. The heart of our lives. The light of the future in our time. Happy Easter.



Safe with our Eternal God

By Fr. Richard Schreurs, SMM

It is quiet on my street. Terribly quiet where otherwise the neighbouring boys cycle around. It is also quiet in my head. The restrictive measures are clear, but for the rest, it is fruitless, looking for the right direction, because you do not know what is coming at us, or from where. What period should we think about? From a couple of houses away this afternoon, a man was picked up by two nurses with an ambulance and in a kind of moon-landing suit.

It comes very close anyway. Our vulnerable age and my lymph node cancer forces us to reflect, but we are supported from all sides. Then I think that I will definitely give my place on the ICU or the ventilator to anyone who has a spouse, a child or one who has still a life task to fulfill.

No matter how little the Church has to offer me for the present or the future, the more I feel secure with the eternal God who holds me and will never let go, as He was made known to me by Jesus Christ and my parents.

Of course, there is a lot of support and friendship coming in from emails and phone calls. I am also very grateful for the help of my neighbours, family and others. Forecasts, oh well: He's got the whole world in His hand.



Back to Myself

By Fr. Stefan Musanaj, SMM

We are in a pandemic crisis and we don't know how to get out. There is a lot of uncertainties. While tens or even hundreds of people die, thousands become infected. The numbers are increasing every day, not proportional to the number of people recovering. Social media takes me into all the sadness and fear. When does all this end?

Imagine I'm losing "my job". The agendas of the parish and the congregation as well as my personal schedules have been cancelled. As a priest who should lead Mass, this situation feels strange. The church has been abandoned. People no longer come together.

Keeping physical distance is a necessity, but social contact should not be ignored. Not even in the community. Even though we live in one house and we do not visit our family and acquaintances, we still keep in touch. Although we are at a distance, we still chat as usual, enjoy morning coffee, eat and join the "online Eucharistic celebration" on Sundays.

I feel grateful because WIFI works well. I can still communicate with parishioners, confreres and family in Indonesia. That is, the coronavirus does not affect my social relationship. To reduce boredom at home, I cycle and run around *Schimmert* every now and then. This is also important for our health.

Yes, thinking about all these strangers during Lent is extraordinary. I have a lot of time to be alone. Does that mean that I am selfish? Not really. The Bishop of our diocese Roermond, Harrie Smeets, calls this period: *mental quarantine*. He even said that this virus also gives us a chance. For what? To return, each of us in solitude and simplicity, as before, we have more time for ourselves, to look at our own lives and to pray for people who have died and for those who suffer.

Despite the many sufferings and dying, I still believe that our Lord is a merciful God. This outbreak will not diminish my belief and desire for a better future. That is why I pray to heal the world and to strengthen the hearts of the families of those who have died; for all humanity who is afraid; for my family and confreres of course.

Marian Claeren