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*"The divine charity of Jesus Christ does not lock doors..." (Don Orione)*

### ***Dearest sisters!***

In this time that has united us all, and with the whole humanity, in a journey of unprecedented suffering, but also of an unprecedented faith and hope, I would like to share with you some reflections. May they help us to orientate and reconsider some things of our life, of our *"lifestyle"*, of our experience of the Vows, of interpersonal relationships and also of our vocation and mission as Orionines. This pandemic time, which has also coincided with Lent, may become a providential *"space"* that helps us to see ourselves in a different way and to confront us in a more authentic and radical way with which we are called to be in the Church and in the world.

How many projects, how many programs were ready and had started for this year 2020... I look at the calendar that the General Council had already published and I cannot avoid thinking about how fragile and vulnerable we are!

So many things organized, by us and by you: activities, initiatives, travels, meetings, celebrations... they blew up in an instant... and the *"pause"*, which before was *"impossible"* to do in the mad rush of our lives, has arrived like a lightning, dressed as a *"pandemic"*, and the world had to *"stop"*...

Everything: certainties, plans, projects have demonstrated their inconsistency... everything had to stop... and we have stopped...

### ***We had no time...***

So many things, always *"put off"* for lack of time, are now in front of us, who are locked in the quarantine, all still and closed at home, and they become the most *"important"* things to do, while they were before left out of our *"projects"* and *"programs"*, because less *"important"*, in our frenetic and perfectly planned race ...

Today, a pandemic has told us to *"stop!"* The *"car"* of our daily life which was used to go at *"180 km/h"* had to *"brake"* suddenly, without the possibility of a previous *"slowdown"* (whoever drives the car knows this and also whoever travels inside it!). We had to accept a *"stop!"* and *"stay at home!"*, striking with the imposed inertia and inactivity which had become -who knows- forgotten so far...

But then, having overcome the initial anxiety and impatience, forced to breathe and relax, we have begun to rediscover, revalue and, why not, savour this *"time"*, which is only apparently still...

We have begun to listen to silence, pause, quiet and regained the pleasure of reflection, of the contemplation of creation... we have found time to pray more deeply, to pray more, to worship, to stop ourselves in the reading of the Word of God...

We have found ourselves in front of ourselves asking ourselves the fundamental questions of our life, our vocation, our mission so far... perhaps we had not questioned ourselves for a long time, who knows, we couldn't do it anymore because we were considering them out of date or... we had no *"time"*...

We had to *"find ourselves"* with our true *"me"*, with its lights and shadows, in a small and stable space and rediscovered many gifts, but also many relational fragility, forced to an unusual coexistence: impatience, fears, indifference, selfishness, loneliness, individualisms... perhaps hidden and disguised in times of *"normality"*...

We have been regaining the *"time"*, the time to invent bridges, to create closeness and gestures of hope, the time to put the *"priorities"* in order, to finish things that had never been concluded...

We have been rediscovering people, bonds, old friendships; we have opened ourselves up to community services, to read a book, to listen to music or birds, to play an instrument or sing...

We have been regaining sensitivity, responsibility and concern for the other, longing for closeness, a handshake or a hug...

Still and closed, we have been opening ourselves to the concern for others, gratitude and gratuitousness... we have been feeling authentically poor, limited, dependent: poor and vulnerable like the poor and the undefended...

### ***We may become "better"...***

The quarantine has awakened the sense of the other, solidarity and compassion. It has awakened the sense of belonging to one and only humanity, all fragile, all needy, all interconnected... It has stripped us of our claim of omnipotence and has made us find our "being creatures", our frailness. We have understood how absolutely everything is in the loving hands of God, before whom we are all equal...

Reading here and there, I have found the following: *"if after this pandemic we will not be better people, then, we will not have learned anything about life"*. I confess I also think the same, I desire it, and I hope so... starting from myself...

I believe that the *"anthropological turn"* that we have spoken about several times has really arrived. Perhaps we were repeating these words without deeply understanding their meaning... If it is true that "we will have to get out of this pandemic better as people", then, a certain *"inhuman"* way of being *"human"* has come to an end. A new way of *"human being"* is emerging from this painful *"childbirth"* of a pandemic that is costing us so many lives...

I believe this is a privileged time in which, as whole humanity, we are protagonists of a *"terminal"* form of *"not being"* and of a painful but joyful *"rising"* of a *"new humanity"*, of a *"new civilization"*. May it be more *"human"* and less *"wild"*, more *"supportive"* and less *"technological"*, more concentrated on *"communion"* and less *"egoistic"*, more *"pacified"* and less *"warlike"*... in a word, the *"civilization of love"* which Jesus came to establish!

### ***Meeting n. 21...***

Returning to the initiatives that we had *"planned"* for this year, one in particular is a reason for a great reflection for me: the renewal of the Vow of Charity...

After this year's Catechesis, we were all preparing for the common celebration of renewal of the fourth Vow, on April 19<sup>th</sup>, the Mercy Sunday...

As we all know, this too *"blew up"* and we had to put it off in order to live it all together, with serenity and, if God wants, after having passed the nightmare of the pandemic.

I believe, sisters, that this is not pure chance. The Lord in his Divine Providence has certainly ordered this for a greater good.

I believe that this *"new time"* that we are being *"given"* is precisely to reflect, once again, on the Vow of Charity in the light of the historical moment we are experiencing, in the light of the pandemic that affects the world, especially the poorest and most disadvantaged. They are those who are asked to *"stay at home"*, but they do not even have a *"home"*; they are those who are asked to *"wash their hands"*, but they do not even have water to drink; they are those who are asked to stay *"one meter away"*, and they sleep 15 people in a single and small area...

We have a *"new time"* in a *"new context"* that calls us to a *"new reflection"*. These are the new poor of the pandemic: the lonely and afraid elderly; the homeless; the newborns from coronavirus positive mothers; the disabled and vulnerable patients in the facilities; the children who do not have the only meal a day assured because of the closing of their schools; the afraid people; but also those who do not take the pandemic seriously, those who do not assume social responsibility in compliance with the rules...

This *"new time"*, the quarantine, is a final "Meeting" of our Catechesis on the IV<sup>th</sup> Vow, *"Meeting n. 21"...* An *"extra"* meeting which, certainly, was missing, and which the Lord has prepared for us, with the title: *"The divine charity of Jesus Christ does not lock doors!"*.

A theme to reflect "*with closed doors*"...! But deeply demanding and active...

No "*closed door*" can stop or prevent the charity of Christ in us...

Pope Francis, in the response he gave me to the e-mail I wrote to him on March 26<sup>th</sup>, addressed me a few words, but which contain a profound message: "*At this moment we must have courage: courage in prayer and courage in action*".

The "*courage*" not to "*lock the doors*" to charity!

### ***Time of courage...***

The Pope is inviting us to reflect and rethink the experience of our Vow of Charity, embodying it in "*this*" historical moment, and to have a distinctly Orionine attitude: the courage.

For this "*courage*" he has shown us two tracks, which harmonize and "*feed back*" one another: "*courage in prayer*" and "*courage in action*". Prayer and action: "*ora et labora!*"

The quarantine time, which has practically "*forced*" us to close certain activities and to "*stay at home*", is by no means a time of "*inactivity*" for us, daughters of Don Orione. Indeed, it is time to put into effect all the "*fantasy of charity*", all the "*creativity of charity*", to rethink and give new and concrete form to the content of the Vow of Charity, to the corporal and spiritual Works of mercy, which are its content.

How to "*reinvent*" charity in times of "*coronavirus*"? What courage in prayer? What courage in action?

Don Orione wrote to us: "*We will have lost nothing when we have not lost charity. The heart of a Missionary of Charity will know no limits to the ardour of her charity, and wherever there will be souls to be saved, unhappy to help, tears to wipe away, she will have no peace until she has not given her life*<sup>1</sup>".

I have already said other times that the most difficult times are the best times for a daughter of Don Orione... We were not born in easy times and we were not born for easy times... the prophecy has always been strong in the most complex historical moments, in the darkest and more contradictory moments. We can see it in Sacred Scripture.

The darkest times spring resources never imagined in us to find the light.

The saddest times spring incredible possibilities in us to radiate the joy of the Gospel.

The most difficult times set in motion the strength of a love that is not of this world.

These times of "*stripping*" make us emerge unprecedented initiatives of charity and gift, poor among the poor and with the poor.

Time of courage, courage in prayer and courage in action, because Christ is the source of courage, strength, light, joy and love.

Don Orione explains it to us in a few words: "*Charitas Christi urget nos! Universal, infinite, eternal charity that urges help - charity that does not lock doors, charity that knows no homeland but heaven*<sup>2</sup>".

The time of "*coronavirus*", the time of quarantine, is thus the "*womb*" in which a new "*courage in prayer and action*" is being "*generated*", staying at home, but with a "*charity that does not lock doors*". Indeed, it exceeds what could have been done or imagined before. It is a time of apostolic fruitfulness and missionary audacity, time of new holiness and fraternity, time of prophecy and charity.

### ***Charity does not go into quarantine...***

Don Orione enlightens us once again: "... *to spread, especially in the little ones, the poor and the most derelict brothers of ours, the comforts of that divine charity of Jesus Christ who does not lock doors, who feels no boundaries: who alone builds and unifies in the Lord, who alone can save society.*<sup>3</sup>"

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<sup>1</sup> Scritti (*Writings*) 67,171.

<sup>2</sup> Scritti (*Writings*) 98,191.

<sup>3</sup> Scritti (*Writings*) 98, 269.

There are many Sisters who are witnessing today the "courage in prayer" before the Blessed Sacrament, invoking and praying for the infected, for the dead, for health workers, offering their limitation or suffering... There are also many initiatives of closeness and hope made through virtual media...

There are many sisters who are witnessing the "courage in action", in border places and in the peripheries of the missions, without making noise. There are also many who are engaged in the various Works and remain firmly and courageously close to the sick, the children, the elderly, the lay staff, risking their own health.

By scrupulously respecting the norms of safety (masks, gloves, distance, hygiene...), however, not abandoning the poor...

I have received the news of many initiatives from the various communities, which highlight this Orionine "courage" and this "fantasy of charity"...

I would like to share some of these experiences with you, knowing that there will be many others in your communities. I think it is important to share, not only the news of the pandemic, but also those that made that "charity that feels no boundaries" raise, the charity wanted by Don Orione. We will be thus able to pray, thank, rejoice together, because what is done in a community, even far and small, belongs to all. This can also stimulate and motivate us more and more, in living with enthusiasm, creativity and resourcefulness the Vow of Charity, here and now, to "go out quickly", like Mary in the Visitation, because "Caritas Christi urget nos!".

**"WE MUST HAVE COURAGE: COURAGE IN PRAYER..."**

**Madagascar: Community of Andrambato,  
House of the Delegation and novitiate**



**Kenya:  
Community of Nairobi**



**Community of Mugoiri**



**Argentina: Community of the Provincial House  
Buenos Aires**



**Brazil: Community of the Provincial House  
Sao Paulo**



***Philippines:  
Community of Quezon City***



***Ivory Coast:  
Community of Anyama***

***Rome: Community of the Generalate House***



***Philippines: Community of Caloocan, novitiate***



***Paraguay: Community of San Juan de las Misiones***



**“WE MUST HAVE COURAGE: COURAGE IN ACTION...”**

- **MADAGASCAR:** Some communities in Madagascar, who work in the field of health, keep working with the poor, providing the necessary treatments, medicines, and also, in this time of pandemic, offer an *"informative"* service to people to help them prevent the contagion.

*Community of Miandrarivo, Dispensary with the FDP*

*Community of Anatazo, Dispensary with the FDP*



*Community of Tsararivotra  
Clinic of the LMSC*



- **ROME,** Community of the Generalate House. The Sisters, observing the security measures, are close to the poor who knock at their door asking for food, to some elderly woman alone in the neighbourhood, even by telephone, and have started to manufacture masks to be given to the poor, for community use, or to be sent at Mother House.



- **KENYA/TANZANIA:** some Communities, where schools had to close, offer a service by distributing food to the poor, offering the refectory for the children, adapting the work of the tailor shop for the packaging of the "masks" which are then distributed to the people. Soaps are also made with camel milk to give them to people. In addition, the Sisters offer a *"formative"* and *"informative"* service to teach people the rules of hygiene and how to use masks to prevent the infection of the coronavirus.

***Community of Laare, refectory for the poor, school and tailor's school.***



**Making soaps**



***Community of Tabora (Tanzania)  
Evangelization and human  
promotion.***

- **PERU, Community of Manchay.**

As LMSC we have a nursery school and kindergarten, currently closed due to quarantine. The Sisters have obtained food and hygiene items from various benefactors, which are distributed to 20 of the poorest families in the area.



- **IVORY COAST:** the Sisters have reorganized the tailoring to manufacture the masks that will be used both for the Hospital and for the Community, and to distribute to the poor. Together with the SDP of the Parish, they have organized a service to the poor for the distribution, through Caritas, of food, hygiene items and protective elements to avoid contagion. People are being trained and informed to become aware of the seriousness of the pandemic.

**Community of Anyama: Hospital, Cottolengo, Tailor's school**





- **PARAGUAY:** the LMSC have a community of evangelization and human promotion and, despite the obligation to stay at home, the Sisters continue to offer help to the poor who knock at the house.



- **PHILIPPINES:** Little Cottolengo of Montalban, where the Sisters collaborate with the SDP. Maternal accompaniment continues to be offered to those assisted, helping them to live this time with serenity and prudence.



- **BURKINA FASO:** the Nako Community, dedicated to evangelization and human promotion, offers people what is possible to this community and, above all, offers water, which is much needed in this time and so much missing in this very poor area of Burkina.



**Dear sisters,** I hope that this humble reflection and this *"virtual journey"* to some realities where ***"charity has not gone into quarantine"*** has given you some relief, has revived hope and joy for the good that you do, and for what we are still called to do.

I hope that the fruit of this such special and different *"Lent"*, lived almost entirely in *"quarantine"*, will awaken in everyone the desire to grow in the vocation to holiness and in the mission, and relight the *"creativity"* in Orionine charity. By doing so, when it arrives the day of the renewal of the Vow of Charity, we will celebrate it by offering the Lord, together with our life, a Congregation renewed in the expressions of a charity that *"does not lock doors"*, of a living and authentic charity that *"knows no boundaries"*, of that *"charity that will save the world!"*.

Let us pray for the whole Congregation, for the whole Orionine Family, for the whole world at this time. Remember that the Pope asked me *"not to forget to pray"* for him, and, with all the strength of those who know in faith that they are listened to, let us ask to the merciful Heart of Jesus: *"have mercy on us and on the whole world"*.

I embrace you fraternally and ***Ave Maria e avanti, always!***

Your sister,

Sr. M. Mabel Spagnuolo  
Superior general

Rome, Generalate House, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020.