

¿How have we lived this time of pandemia in our Community of Humocaró?

From the start we have been living it in total communion with the suffering world, surprised by a sickness of this kind, but above all in communion with Italy and Spain, for the rapidity of the expansion of the contagion and the high indices of deaths, including deaths within religious communities; in communion with Italy and Spain also because some relatives and friends have migrated to these countries as have many other Venezuelans. As the months go by, we are living with mounting intensity our communion with the rest of our country which suffers silently its typical internal problems without any social-political improvement; no need to mention the economy: we're the country with the highest inflation on the whole planet.

But even so, despite all that, we haven't failed to celebrate and make feast for the re-election, July 25th, of our Madre Paola in her abbatial service, and for the life God gives us through her and her dedication to us. Life is always to be handed on continually with undying hope.

Our Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Barquisimeto, a great friend of the Cistercian life since he is a former postulant of the monastery of Los Andes, came down, at the cost of overcoming many obstacles (these being the scarcity of gasoline for transport and the obtaining of the safe-conduct permit which had been denied him because he is not a friend of the government) -came down to preside at the abbatial election. The election looked like, more than anything else, the preparation for a surgical operation, what with all the gloves, masks, and disinfectants we had to use in the chapel and the chapter-room. The bishop had been, some days before, with a priest who later tested out covid-19 positive; so he wanted to be very prudent. He congratulated us for taking all the precautions, since many people at that moment, in fact didn't believe that in Venezuela the coronavirus could spread so much.

Since July, and now in the month of August, we hear in our country about the increasing spread of covid-19, and the number of persons affected by it is greater every day. We have cases of it close by; it is affecting friends, members of the family or others we know. Certain states are especially exposed to the flow of persons entering and leaving, like Maracaibo, in a frontier zone which has a big Chinese market, or Táchira and Oriente, where the families of two of our sisters live and have already been caught by the disease. All the sectors to which many desperate Venezuelans have returned from Colombia and other countries for having lost their jobs because of the quarantine; some came on foot, resisting for thousands of kilometers.

We have taken certain measures of isolation, such as closing the guesthouse to groups or persons for retreats, although holding it open for lodging two persons that work in the infirmary. We haven't laid off our workers, seeing that the work we offer them is an indispensable help for their subsistence, since the hyperinflation we are living doesn't spare anyone. We continue to receive help and share it with our neighbors even more needy than we are - keeping the rules of distancing - in their most elemental needs, sharing what we providentially receive; because neither are we able to maintain ourselves with just our own work.

What people are making isn't enough for a complete daily menu, still less for buying medicines of any type. If some receive help in cash from outside, they can probably just make it for an austere daily life. And Venezuela doesn't have a capacity of health assistance to cover such an extraordinary problem.

However, since we are no longer at the starting point when there was hardly any information about this virus and its manner of attacking humans, we are listening to what expert voices are saying about treatment for

the infirmity and its possible remedy and prevention. And so, taking seriously what they are saying, we began, already some months ago, to fortify our immunological system with home-made recipes and other medications. In addition, of course, to taking the necessary precautions with persons from outside with whom we are inevitably in contact.

This whole situation imposes on us a trusting and humble vision of faith. Without that it is impossible to live in the monastery, above all for us: we have dedicated our whole life to the Lord and to the cause of his Kingdom. These are moments of trial which make us question ourselves and open ourselves to a still deeper purification of reality, embrace what the Lord is doing in us by way of this history, and say with Job from the depth of our heart: "What happens is that we are ready to receive good things from God, but not so, what is hard. (NIV: Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?)" (Job 2, 20). With Pope Francis in his homily of March 27th we can say: "The strength of God is this: to change into good everything that happens to us, even what is bad. He brings serenity to our storms, because with God true life never dies."

A word important for us at this time is the expression "CEASE". It's the first word of a prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which not only orders the virus to advance no more, but also helps us to ask, each one, herself: What are you seeking? What is your hope now? What does God want of me now, at this moment that our country, our community, is living? We have dialoged, trying to find an answer to these questions; and, some months ago, we prepared some inscriptions on paper in shape of a medallion, with the prayer alluded to above, to share it with our neighbors.

We have been very much struck by the news that gets to us about the global analysis of how the pandemic got started, and it makes us sad to know that it was man himself that created a virus of this type in a laboratory, as a biological weapon against his supposed enemies. Or again to hear that the world health organization follows the interests of certain powerful personages that have a structured plan to reduce the general population and manipulate economies just as they happen to wish. That is why they didn't give information on time, nor did they do it truthfully and opportunely.

The world is running to its self-destruction by way of a disguised culture of death with a lot of propaganda about a new world order, with just one religion which would supposedly take care for the happiness and wellbeing of humanity. We are facing times of crisis at every level, and that cannot be covered up.

We pray, with an ever-growing awareness of the reality and the mission we have in the Church and in humanity, in the silent, hidden fidelity of each day, which is not hidden from the eyes of our Father in Heaven, who sees what is hidden and is solicitous for our salvation. We grow in the hope that the world will cease from its unbridled race toward illusions that can never truly satisfy, and will raise its eyes toward that which is truly enduring forever. We pray that the culture of death lose all its footholds in the mind and heart of persons, where it invades like another pandemic, silent but insidious, that would destroy humanity in its very foundations.

We join in the prayer and offering of each and every member of our Order, dearly-loved sisters and brothers; and grateful to the Lord for this experience of communion and unity that this moment in history has made strong.

Humocaró Alto, 20 de Agosto de 2020