

Coronavirus, Faith beyond Fear

Torre Pellice, February the 28th, 2020

Dear Sisters, dear Brothers in Christ,

until last week our life was as usual, as were our habits: family community and church commitments, work, study, running the house, caring for your children and grandchildren, volunteer work, meetings with associations and programming, then the Coronavirus infection that had struck China a few months ago suddenly became real, something we have to deal with, with calm and wisdom. We have found the world is small, with distances have shrunk. Ever since we started talking about the virus in Italy and the risk of an epidemic, we have been frightened. We have been bombed by at times contradictory, sometimes misleading messages that have contributed to increase our fear.

Authorities have issued precautionary orders to understand the origin, the extent of the contagion, how to contain it and organize health care measures consistently with collective responsibility. These precautionary measures have also touched the life of our churches and their practical organization as well as our individual and family lives. However, if the authorities did not issue orders, each and every one of us would be at the mercy of brazen or terrorised attitudes in the framework of potential social disintegration.

Precautionary measures are in themselves a way of caring for oneself, for one's own family and others, especially for those who, suffering from existing conditions, find themselves more exposed to severe consequences following a possible coronavirus contagion. Observing precautionary measures is a way of taking care of the community, of the society we live in: it is something we do for our own good and for the good of others, everyone of us shouldering their responsibility.

We are grateful to all health care workers: general practitioners, hospital doctors, nursing home workers, researchers, all the frontline workers, as well as to all those in services and manufacturing who are carrying out their jobs while abiding by precautions. Our churches are also acting according to the government's decrees, not calling on our constitutional right to assemble freely, not meeting with our brothers and sisters which is what we would like to do, and radically reorganising our plans.

In recent days, however, we have seen that the precautionary decrees have not avoided attitudes and behaviour dictated by fear to surface, as can be seen in the hoarding of food and health devices.

When fear governs us, there are sides of our humanity that emerge and cause us to adopt attitudes that do not correspond to the principles of our Faith, which is based on absolute trust in God: rivalry and selfishness win over solidarity. Distrust, suspicion, hostility and, in some cases, gratuitous violence raise their dangerous heads in our society, irrationality overcoming reason and common sense.

We want to take the sense of fear towards the unknown and the wish to do something seriously facing up to the sense of powerlessness that overtakes us when there are events we do not govern and that appear to threaten us. At the same time we cannot forget that especially in the face of threatening events, the Scriptures tell us to stop, self examine and pray so as not to lose the deep meaning of the things that are happen to us and in our lives, the our calling.

The decrees taken for the good of the community in many Regions, are intended to stimulate a sense of responsibility. They also affect our being church, especially with regards to the gatherings of people in listening to the Word of God, in praise, in caring for others and others.

We have no precepts to observe and every evangelical person knows that he or she can read the Bible and pray at home, with those who wish to be associated in a small group of relatives and neighbours following the words of Jesus: "For Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them". But our calling goes beyond the individual: God has called us to be a body, gathering our individualities because our faith, its questions and hopes need the comfort of others and others in listening together to the Word. As Protestants the church is not a secondary event for us.

It seems important to us to remember, on days when the church may seem only a place of contagion to be avoided. If proclaiming and listening to the Word is a key part of the life of the church, as is mutual support in listening, we are certain that even in these days we will find ways to ensure that we do not fail. Pastors, deacons can be reached by telephone, by email, on social networks, they can be welcomed at home or reached in their church offices or at home. The Word can make its way through the reading of meditations published in books or on our institutional website chiesavaldese.org, *Riforma*, through the readings proposed by "*Un giorno una parola*", listening to the evangelical service on *RAI Radio 1* or , alone or with the involvement of a few others, or with initiatives yet to be tried out. The important thing is to think together and to remember that even today God has something to tell us and speaks to us, that our fear can be governed, that we are not at the mercy of ourselves.

The Waldensian Table