



Pax Christi USA Coronavirus Response

Reflection and Prayer for March 22, Day of Worldwide Solidarity and Prayer

This reflection can be used for individual prayer or in a (small) group or family. This was compiled and created with the image of "praying with the Bible in one hand, and a newspaper in the other." (Only instead of a newspaper, we will have a Facebook post!) May this reflection on Scripture and first-person account serve as entry points for experiencing God through LECTIO DIVINA.¹ There is space for reflection and sharing; for those praying by themselves, we invite you to reflect on your own and after you finish, reach out to a neighbor or friend to share your thoughts, prayers, and this resource.

Centering: Begin with acknowledging the presence of God around and within the space and people present. If available, light a candle to remember those who have already died from exposure to the coronavirus. Take a few deep breaths and acknowledge any emotions that arise within you.

Opening Prayer – Prayer for peace and solidarity in a time of pandemic

Creator God,

We look to you during this time of illness, uncertainty, and physical distancing from others.
Be with us as we place our anxieties and fears in your hands.
Free us from the illusion of invincibility, so that we might remember our actions affect others,
especially the most vulnerable.
Free us from the fear of scarcity, which leads to competition and hoarding.
Free us from painful anxiety, so that it can be transformed into caring actions for ourselves and others.

Jesus, our brother,

As your ministry of healing brought physical wellness and connection and restored community,
help us remember that we are not alone.
As you mourned the death of your friend Lazarus, be with those who grieve the loss of loved ones.
May they feel your presence and peace.
As you experienced death, be with those who have died from the coronavirus.
May they be in your eternal embrace.

¹ Faggioli, Massimo. "Mass Myopia and Coronavirus," *La-Croix*, March 17, 2020: "And during this time of pandemic we should be focusing less on live-streamed Masses, "spiritual communion" and private devotions. The hierarchy (Pope Francis included) should be encouraging Catholics to explore the Liturgy of the Hours, "lectio divina" and family celebrations of the Word. There is enormous potential in this. It's not just a matter, in some countries especially, of offering a viable alternative to the hyper-clerical fare that some Catholic media like EWTN dishes up. It's also about providing real spiritual nourishment in ways that are theologically richer and technologically just as simple." <https://international.la-croix.com/news/mass-myopia-and-coronavirus/12010>

As you challenged your disciples to act for the common good, be with national and local leaders who have the power to ensure that the “least of these” have their basic needs met. Inspire them to have a global vision of solidarity, a consciousness and priority to provide healthcare to all.

Spirit of God, breath of life,

Thank you for the countless nurses, custodial staff, doctors, receptionists, therapists, healthcare providers, and all others who are working to care for those who are sick and suffering. As they live their vocations, may they be sustained by your Spirit.

Open our eyes to see the devastating implications of economic and racial injustice during this crisis. Be with vulnerable populations who are unable to have “social distance” from others, thereby increasing their likelihood of contagion.²

Inspire our actions for equitable access to testing, treatment, and financial support for all affected by coronavirus.

We pray together as Pax Christi USA that, during this Lenten season and current pandemic, we can turn away from fear and be faithful to our sacred and civic responsibility for others. AMEN.

A Reading from the Gospel of Mark (Mark 2:1-5, 11-12, New American Bible, Revised Edition)

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

A Reading from Bishop Pablo Virgilio David, Facebook Post, March 15, 2020³ (Bishop of Kalookan, Philippines):

HOW DO WE APPLY CONCEPTS LIKE “LOCKDOWN” & “COMMUNITY QUARANTINE” IN THE NON-FIRST WORLD SETTING?

As usual, it is the poor who suffer the most when a first world concept is applied in a third world setting.

Yesterday was Sunday. I thought of the thousands of drivers of jeepneys, tricycles and pedicabs who earned no income because there were no passengers going to Mass in Churches on account of the state prohibition of mass gatherings. I also thought of the peddlers in the streets, those who sell

² Those in detention centers or prisons, workers who are unable to work from home, people experiencing homelessness, etc. ...

³ David, Pablo Virgilio. Facebook Post, March 15, 2020.

<https://www.facebook.com/pablovirgilio.david/posts/10216169740373293>.

sampaguitas, candles, and all sorts of items to the Sunday worshippers. I thought of the casuals and contractuales who had to be sent home—no work, no pay.

The “unchurched poor” who think of Sunday, not as a day of worship, but as a day for earning a more substantial income by providing services or peddling things to Sunday worshippers did not earn their keep yesterday. Alas, for many of the urban poor in the slums areas in our diocese, rest on a Sunday is something they cannot afford.

“Isang kahig, isang tuka” (one scratch, one peck) is the common Filipino idiom describing the situation of the poorest of the poor. They are usually classified by the government not as “unemployed” but as “underemployed”. You cannot even call them contractuales because their means of livelihood do not involve any kind of contract at all. They have no social benefits like SSS, PhilHealth, & Pag-ibig. They have no day-offs, no maternity/paternity leaves, no vacation, no paid leaves. It’s always “no work, no income” for them. And no income means no food on the table. Period. [...]

First world countries can easily declare “lockdowns” and “community quarantines” because they presuppose that their citizens have decent, relatively spacious homes with bedrooms where they can self-quarantine themselves and maintain “social distancing.” As Fr. Danny Pilario, CM asked a few days ago in his post, “Who will explain that animal they call ‘social distancing’ to the poor who live in our slums?” If they are ordered to “stay home” than loiter in the streets, are those who come up with such directives even aware that most of the urban poor live like sardines in their little shanties? As a matter of fact, they would rather stay outside precisely because there is a little more space out there in their street alleys, their covered courts, their “talipapas”.

In first world countries, their governments can declare paid no-work days because they presuppose that most of their citizens are employed. The unemployed and people with disabilities receive welfare subsidies. The retired ones receive their pensions. In short, even if they stop working they are assured that they will not go hungry.

Here’s the big nightmare: just one or two infected ones in an overly congested slum community would multiply into a thousand within a few days. Just one or two infected visitors in a city jail that has a maximum capacity of 200 but is actually holding 2,600 (as in Caloocan city jail and most other jails in the country), will multiply into hundreds and even thousands within a few days!

And which barangay health center has the capacity to do laboratory testing to determine whether the so-called PUMs (persons under monitoring) or the PUIs (persons under investigation) are positive of infection? And, presuming such testing procedures are made available in the health centers in the slum areas and are able to isolate the “Confirmed” virus carriers from the PUIs and PUMs, where will the infected ones be treated? Our public hospitals are always full already, COVID-19 or no COVID-19! It is not unusual to see the poor waiting in the corridors of public health care facilities. Obviously, the poor have no choice but wait in corridors because they cannot afford private hospitals, which, by the way, are not enough either.

I wonder if these questions even figure in the imagination of the people in government who set the directives? Just asking.

Obviously, because we cannot leave it all to government agencies, we have to do our part as citizens.

Let his season of Lent be the perfect opportunity to come up with creative and out-of-the box responses motivated by Christian compassion and charity and aimed at mitigating the serious impact of “lockdowns” and “community quarantines” on the poorest of the poor in our vicinities. Let us call it **“Love in the Time of COVID-19.”**

Reflection Questions and Sharing:

- What does “Love in the Time of COVID-19” look like for you, in your own community?
- Recall the Healing of the Paralytic from the Gospel of Mark. The man in need of healing was brought to Jesus in seemingly impossible odds: there was a massive crowd already, he wasn’t able to go to Jesus without the help of others, and the roof had to be opened to get him inside the house. How might this reading speak to you in a new way in light of the coronavirus?
- What stays with you after reading the post from Bishop Pablo Virgilio David?
- As the pandemic grows more and more each day, what fears or anxieties are heaviest on your heart?
- During this time of enforced separation, what are ways you have maintained connections with others? What new possibilities may have come to your attention during this reflection time?

Take a moment to recall the strongest feeling or reaction you have had during this prayer time. What might be your invitation from God at this time?

Closing: *When This is Over*, by Laura Kelly Fanucci⁴

When this is over,
may we never again
take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbors
A crowded theatre
Friday night out
The taste of communion
A routine checkup
The school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath

⁴ Fanucci, Laura Kelly. Facebook Post and Graphic. March 16, 2020. <https://motheringspirit.com/>

A boring Tuesday
Life itself

When this ends,
may we find
that we have become
more like the people
we wanted to be
we were called to be
we hoped to be
and may we stay
that way—better
for each other
because of the worst.