



WHAT CHRISTMAS?

Pastoral Letter
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03/20



Dear Gozitan brethren and foreign residents,

I am writing to you all keeping you in my mind and in my prayers in these particularly trying times.

1 A difficult time for all

My thoughts go to you, families having children at school: your worries about what may come about if basic requirements such as mask-wearing and hand washing are not adhered to. My thoughts go to you kids: keeping in mind what your parents warn you about, perhaps feeling anxious about the possibility of losing one of your dear parents or grandparents. My thoughts go to you teachers: to carry out your duty you are putting yourselves, and consequently your families, at constant risk.

My thoughts go to you, adolescents: on the one hand you may feel that adults are fretting too much about nothing, and on the other hand you may feel suffocated because of restrictions to movement and socializing. You may be experiencing feelings of anxiety linked to uncertainty related to study and work prospects, hoping that these trying times pass as soon as possible, to enable the resumption of normality.

My thoughts go to you, engaged couples, who apart from managing the difficulties tied to work and loans, have to contend with the added problems related to the actual date of your marriage celebration given the uncertain immediate future. All of you engaged in any kind of work more or less are preoccupied about being possible carriers of the Covid-19 virus, thus jeopardizing the health of your loved ones at home.

My thoughts go to you who have either lost your job or else are living in fear of losing it; you who are labouring to make ends meet and have been faced with an unprecedented challenge, and who feel embarrassed sharing your tormented state of mind with others.

My thoughts go to you, health carers, doctors, nurses and attending various professionals in the field: I am fully aware of the extraordinary circumstances you are working in, with the mounting preoccupation of a worsening situation.

My thoughts go to you, the elderly, who may be victims of isolation owing to the enforced distance from your families. You who are living with the fear of ending up in bed or in hospital in isolation, without the solace of your loved ones.

My thoughts go to you who are barely coping with ill-health and facing the possibility of being infected with the Covid-19 virus. This added anxiety does not help at all to regain health. You who are currently struggling with the Covid-19 virus or in quarantine may be assailed with nagging doubts and contrasting emotions: Why me? How did it come about? To whom may I have transmitted the virus? How serious is my situation? How do I know that I am regaining my health? What are others saying about me? When will I get well again?

My thoughts go to you who feel stressed out and subject to very challenging moments when you feel you cannot sustain much longer such a state of being with its underlying pressure.

My thoughts go to you, priests and religious people, who, like me, face the difficulties of pastoral work, the uncertainty of any planning regarding the

upcoming Advent and Christmas season with the ensuing Catechism imparted to children, whether adolescent and young people groups are feasible, whether adults could go on with their formation in groups, and how to tackle the distribution of Holy Communion to the house-bound and those who are hospitalized. Pastoral collaborators are sharing with us these preoccupations.

2 Possible reactions

We can go through this period dominated by the pandemic as if we were having a bad dream hoping it would dissipate as soon as possible. We damn the moment this pandemic broke out in China and took root in Malta. Thus, we seek to project our thoughts *post-pandemic*, deleting from our memory the present time.

“ We should not dismiss peremptorily assailing doubts and needling uncertainties with facile answers or with a load of activities! ”

We can go through this time plagued with exaggerated fear bordering on panic, certain that I or one of my loved ones will get the virus. That would be the end of it all.

We can go through this time as if nothing untoward is happening and we can proceed with life as usual, disdaining all the current fuss.

These reactions, unfortunately, denote a clear disengagement from reality and from what is happening all around us.

But we can go through this time by pausing a while from the customary hectic lifestyle. And give time to time by reflecting... and seeking answers. In other words, we give time for our minds to think and our hearts to feel! We should not dismiss peremptorily assailing doubts and needling uncertainties with facile answers or with a load of activities!

3 Advent: a time of waiting and questioning

The period leading up to Christmas, which we call Advent, of itself entails the posing of questions and an active waiting. In the prevailing uncertain times, it is very easy to conclude that God has abandoned us to our fate! Or that he does not exist! Or that if he does, then he simply does not care.

Could it be that these conclusions denote that up till now we have always carried on under our own steam? Could it be that taken up as we are with the hectic lifestyle forever immersed in work, we have been tricked into believing that we can do it all on our own? Could it be that God comes to mind only when things go awry?

It could be that we feel that if God were to be God, he should be doing what we expect from Him, *inter alia* put a stop to the onslaught of Covid-19. It could be that when this does not materialize, we conclude that 'it is pointless to go on believing'. Or that God simply does not exist or is totally uncaring.



“ Could it be that
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Could it be that when we feel good, God is present in our lives but in a very discreet manner to the point of obscurity? Could it be that the goods we possess are nothing but his providence? Could it be that God does not make a fuss just to ensure that we do not feel obliged to pay him back with our love? Could it be that life, health, family, friends, wealth... are all his gifts even when unacknowledged?

Could it be that in difficult times he is more present than in prosperous times? Could it be that if in times of plenty we acknowledge his presence, it is easier to do so in hard times? Could it be that when we are grateful for his gifts, we encounter him also in adverse times, certain of his loving care and that we will never be abandoned?

4 God answers our questions

When we bring to mind the events as narrated in the Holy Scriptures, we become aware that every time the people of God turned to him with questions, God did not disappoint. The worse that could happen is that we suppress emerging questions and smother profound feelings in our hearts because we have decidedly lost hope.

During Advent, which commences on the last Sunday of November, I would like to invite you to not shy away from any questions or feelings you may be experiencing, particularly during the Covid-19 times! Let us not be afraid to seek God. In fact, our heartfelt plea during Advent is: “Come, Lord Jesus!”.

“ Even today, God lends us his ear and makes our troubles and afflictions his own. ”



Even today, God lends us his ear and makes our troubles and afflictions his own. That is what he did with the Jewish people during their slavery in Egypt and later during their exile in Babylon. For this to come about we must acknowledge that left to our own devices we can never provide adequate answers to searing questions.

I strongly recommend to you to participate personally whenever possible in the significant celebrations which are held in our parishes in preparation for Christmas. If so required by the prevailing situation, you can participate by following the celebrations online. Thus, as One People of God we sum up all our questions in the heartfelt entreaty: “*Come, Lord Jesus – Maranatha!*”

Given at the Bishop’s Curia, Victoria
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Solemnity of Christ the King

+ Anton Teuma

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