

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

The recent weeks of confinement in so many countries have shown us clearly both human limitations and also human greatness. We have witnessed how a virus has destabilized our life and that of millions of people around the world. Perhaps we have learned to value more consciously things that we had taken for granted.

Let us continue praying especially for those who have died and for their families, who in many cases have not been able to accompany their loved ones physically during their final moments. We too have experienced this sorrow in our own heart for so many faithful of the Work who have left us for heaven and whose intercession we now seek.

At the same time, we have also seen the generous self-giving—at times heroic—of so many people who have worked shifts in hospitals often without being able to rest, who have cared for others in their homes, who have lengthened their work day at home, or have carried out essential jobs for society even with the risk of contagion. Their example reminds us of the words Jesus addressed to his apostles during the Last Supper: “I am among you as one who serves” (*Lk 22:27*).

The exceptional circumstances of this time of isolation have led many people to reflect on the meaning of life and, not infrequently, have awakened a greater desire for God. Perhaps this has happened to us too. At the same time, the impossibility of receiving the sacraments in the usual way—especially the Eucharist and Confession—has most likely led us to appreciate them and desire them more strongly. In any case, we have tried to stay closer to our Lord and bring others to Him. God has made Himself present in many environments, and He has given us, as with so many others, the strength to accompany those who are alone or have suffered in a special way.

Through the initiative of many people, the formational activities offered by the Work have been able to continue—and even in some cases, to expand—thanks to modern technology. I give thanks to God for the apostolic zeal of my daughters and sons, who have employed their creativity and time to continue spreading Christ’s message. These activities have generated a great amount of interest, and very many people have expressed their gratitude for the possibility of taking advantage of them in a way suited to their present circumstances. This time has shown us, with a broader perspective, how the digital means can in the future be a great help to continue offering formation when obstacles arise such as distance or sickness, and to carry out many other activities.

Naturally, throughout all this time we have missed the physical nearness of many people. The necessary distance that we have kept has probably renewed in each of us an eagerness for personal contact, both in the many expressions of friendship and in the means of formation

(circles, days of recollection, meditations, personal talks and classes of doctrinal formation), which little by little will once again start taking place in person.

Several weeks ago, when speaking about Jesus' relationship with his disciples, the Pope reminded us that the Church is formed through a "concrete familiarity" (cf. Homily, 17 April 2020), which is reflected in living close to our Lord through the sacraments and close to others personally. As I told you several months ago, our centers "should be places where many people find a sincere love and learn to be true friends" (*Pastoral letter*, 1 November 2019).

Thus we understand very well why John and Andrew ask Jesus: "Teacher, where are you staying?" (cf. *Jn* 1:38). They need his company; they need to be physically close to Christ and to come to know Him not just through what others tell them. This closeness to Jesus deepened their friendship, which will lead them to give their life, to be apostles. Some words of Saint Josemaria come to mind here: "Jesus shares words of affection and encouragement, and responds to friendship with his own friendship. What marvelous conversations in the home at Bethany, with Lazarus, Martha and Mary!" (*Letter*, 24 October 1965, no. 10).

Even though in many places people are gradually returning to a new and relative normality, there is still a way to go. Let us ask our Lord for the strength to bear cheerfully the serious difficulties to which this time has given rise in families, in workplaces and in our apostolic initiatives. And let us not fail to accompany with our prayer and—whenever possible—with our own help so many people who, in various countries, still find themselves in especially dramatic situations.

During the month of May, and particularly with the global situation of our world, let us have special recourse to the motherly mediation of our Lady, *Mater misericordiae*.

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leonardo". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rome, 15 May 2020