

Letter to the Congregation and lay Assumptionists of the Alliance at this moment of the Covid 19 pandemic

« Let us fix our hope on God ! »

Dear Brothers, sisters, and friends,

Just a few weeks we could not have imagined that our world would be facing a grave health crisis. But so it is, « As it was in the days of Noah.....they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage up to the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came..... Lk 17:26-27).

The message that I am addressing to you today is one of encouragement to live this time of distress in peace and hope. Our Lent will be longer this year because there is every reason to believe that all the health measures now in place will last beyond Easter. Let us benefit from this time to strengthen our friendship with Jesus Christ. It is too early to draw lessons from the current crisis. The first order of business is that of fighting this calamity. So many cases of solidarity that we have heard of should spur us to contribute to this wave of generosity that is touching the hearts of our fellow brothers and sisters. It would be a mistake to turn in on oneself and forget the brother or sister who shares my misfortune. Let us take time to read the Word of God more attentively. Let us also seek to identify those ways which our ancestors in the faith were able to live through trials just as severe by placing their trust in the name of the Lord. Let us direct our energy to forging new

expressions of solidarity....first of all in our communities, where many of us are confined as of now, but also beyond ourselves by being in touch with people who are isolated by giving them a call or using social media. Let us seek to bear witness to our brotherhood with our elderly in retirement homes and demonstrating our friendship with them. Let us also be mindful of communities that are in precarious situations because they lack the very means to live and let us show them our support. Let us be in communion of mind and heart with our lay brothers and sisters in the Assumption, some of whom are on the front lines battling this plague.

Let us also develop the virtue of hope. It serves no purpose to add our voices to those criticizing governmental and health authorities and seeking to identify who is responsible, who is at fault. In the battle against evil, we must make every effort to bear witness to Christian hope which is « hoping even when there is no reason to hope » (Rm 4:18). Rather let us recall Jesus' words, « we must do the works of the one who sent me while it is day » (Jn 9:4). Even if we think that night has come, our mission in the world is to show forth the Light of Christ who triumphs over all evil and darkness. As long as there are Christians and men and women of good-will who do battle with evil, it will not have the final word. Christ is the Light of the world and in him there is no darkness at all. Our faith is at times subject to weakness. It is often assailed by doubt and questions, but our faith is alive and it contributes to this momentous battle against evil. The coronavirus pandemic is, in some ways, an image of the eternal battle between good and evil. At the Assumption we are aware of the price to be paid for remaining steadfast

in one's faith. We have martyrs, brothers and sisters who gave their lives bearing witness to their love of the Lord. But there have also been so many who remain anonymous who throughout their lives were, in all simplicity, at the service of humankind. We must take inspiration from their example.

Moreover, in the Christian regime faith is always synonymous with involvement. What can I do to engage in battle with this evil? Within me there is a battle going on, namely that against sin. Lent invites us to make room for God and to rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way of our path to the Kingdom. We might make a profound examination of conscience to take a look, in the light of Christ, at everything that touches upon the will of God.

While we may be confined to our homes and our communities, there is still a spiritual communion to be forged with each other. Prayer is our strength, our refuge.....not in order to flee distressing realities, but in order to unite us more closely with those who are battling against evil, solitude, and death. Let us think of our isolated and sick brothers and sisters; let us pray for caretakers and for all those who, by their work, provide continuity in such needed services; let us pray as well for pastors and priests who today are so often helpless and unable to reach the People of God.

Our 175th anniversary is marked by this epidemic plague. Everyone is exposed to this danger. The Assumption knows that it cannot presume to possess eternal life, but it also knows that it is called to give thanks to God for all that He does for humanity. Our mission at the Assumption is to pursue, « with faces not blushing for shame » (Ps

34:6), the proclamation of the Good News. To achieve this, I conclude by leaving the final word to the pen of our father St. Augustine, who in the face of Rome's fall saw the possibility for renewal.

« God did not promise me this, that these things won't perish, this isn't what Christ promised me. The eternal one promised eternal things; if I believe, from being mortal I shall become eternal... »

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praises always in my mouth (*Ps. 34:1*). *Let the world prosper, let the world be turned upside down; I will bless the Lord who made the world; come what may, I will bless him...*

The city that gave us birth in the flesh remains standing, thank God. If only it could be brought to spiritual birth, and pass over with us to eternity! If the city which gave us birth in the flesh does not remain standing, the one which gave us birth in the spirit does...

The holy city, the faithful city, the city wandering over the earth as a stranger was founded in heaven... Why panic, just because earthly kingdoms crumble? That's why a heavenly kingdom was promised to you, so that you wouldn't crumble away with the earthly ones...

So, brothers and sisters, don't let our spirits fail within us; an end will come to all earthly kingdoms. If this is the end now, God can see. Perhaps after all, it isn't the end, and prompted by a certain weakness, or pity, or misery, that's what we wish, that it isn't yet the end; but does that mean the end will never come? Fix your hopes on God, long for eternal things, look forward to eternal realities. You're

Christians, brothers and sisters, we're Christians. Christ didn't come down into the flesh for pleasure's sake. Let us rather tolerate than love our present condition; adversity is straightforward with its punishments, prosperity deceitful with its blandishments. Why set your heart on earth when this earth presents us with nothing but ruins? »¹

Soon we will be celebrating Holy Week and the great feast of Easter. Even though this year our ceremonies will be without the participation of the People of God, we will all be united in thought and prayer. We will 'make' Church no matter what. It is the life of Christ that will be given to us abundantly. Death will not have the last word.

May the Holy Spirit guide us amidst the trials of this life and may he give us the strength and courage to bear witness to the Father and to the Son. May the Lord watch over you and keep you safe!

Very Rev. Benoît GRIÈRE, A.A.

Superior general

March 31, 2020

¹ Sermon 105: 8, 9, 11