

## Towards new times: all people as one family



From 18<sup>th</sup> May, Mass can be celebrated again [with a congregation], by taking all necessary precautions of course. Could you comment briefly on this?

Maria Voce: We have always followed the Pope's Mass and there have been very many opportunities to pray together online. But we cannot hide the fact that Christianity is an embodied religion. We feel the need to be physically present at the liturgy, to participate more directly and actively in the sacraments of Christianity. So we certainly missed participating in the Eucharist in a real way and this gift is now being given back to us.

So we are ready to do all that is required, to take precautions in order not to miss this opportunity.

Q: Of course, many things have happened during this time. We have had to review our behaviour and what we buy. What do you think the pandemic is bringing out in social life and therefore also in church life?

Maria Voce: It is bringing out beautiful things but there can also be bad things. A first thing worth emphasizing is equality among all. The pandemic has shown that faced with this small virus that we have been hit by, we are all the same. It has affected the powerful as well as the poor, the



rich and those who have nothing, children as well as adults, those in prison and those outside. So in this sense we are all truly equal.

At the same time the pandemic has also revealed many inequalities that are not created by the fact of being human, but are created by different cultures, by prejudices and by lifestyles. So some people can afford treatment and others cannot; some people have homes where they can isolate themselves and others are forced to live with several people in a very small space. Some people have lost their jobs and can draw on savings set aside in a bank account; others don't have anything to draw on and when they lose their jobs, they and their families are in danger of going hungry.

So, unfortunately, inequalities have become even more obvious. And this should make us reflect, because it's clear that these inequalities are not wanted by God, nor are they willed by human nature. They are due to the ill will of people who have not been able to manage correctly the gifts that God has given us all. We need to make up for these inequalities so as not to find ourselves, when the pandemic is over, in a worse state than we were before. Instead, we want to come out of this having gained from realising the need for equality and make programs that respect the equal dignity of all.

Q: What about the church community?

Maria Voce: For the church community, I feel this period has highlighted what is essential, because so many things have fallen by the wayside. We have seen that church walls are not essential but that living the Church as communion is essential. We've seen that going every day to visit Jesus in the sacrament of the Eucharist is not essential, but it is essential to love our neighbour; it is essential to answer with love to the people near us; it is essential to seek out inspiration for our lives from Jesus' words in the Gospel. Many things have fallen away even on an ecclesial level.

However, this has done us nothing but good, because it spurs us towards the rebirth of which

Pope Francis continually speaks, to the resurrection and the completely new start we can make in truly reforming the Church in a vital way, not in an institutional or formal way.

Q: Which of these essentials is most essential?

Maria Voce: The most essential thing is to keep in mind that we are one human family. Being part of one human family must push us all to take care of each other and take care of creation, which is the only house this one human family is living in. We must care responsibly, attentively, precisely because Christianity makes us look at this reality also in a responsible way. We are all members of a family but we are all responsible for this family. Therefore, every person in this family is important; everyone has rights but they also have duties. There is a collective responsibility.

I think this must push us to make proposals, to put forward programs, to see what can be done to truly include everyone. We must propose ways forward both in the economy and in politics, ways that can truly look to the common good, not to the good of one group or another, not to the interests of one side or the other but to the good of all. So proposals should be put forward that aim towards a communion of goods on a more universal level.

Then the Church itself – and we too, in fact, as Focolare Movement – is universal, it has no boundaries. In a certain sense, the Church competes on equal terms with the virus. The virus is not afraid of borders but neither is the Church; the Church is universal because it is God's family on earth.

We must look to this, God's family, to see how to make it truly be one family. We must see how to create structures that enable the integral development of all, which respect the history, culture and way of life of each people, without coercing them into developing according to our models or our plans. At the same time, we should make available to each other all the talents with which God has endowed every people, every culture and every person. We can make them available to each other so that all together we can make the world become a common home that is ever more beautiful and ever more worthy of being inhabited by the children of God.

Q: Maria Voce, what reactions has this time brought about in Focolare Movement? How have you been reflecting on this?

Maria Voce: The same reactions as everyone, in the sense that we too, from one day to the next, found ourselves not being able to organise our lives, neither personally nor as a Movement. So we had to change all our programs. It is an important year for us because it is the centenary year of Chiara Lubich's birth. We have the General Assembly of the Movement planned for the month of September and several preparatory meetings for the Assembly were scheduled. All this ground to a halt from one moment to the next, from one day to the next, so we found ourselves completely unable to foresee, plan and think what could be done. Naturally, this was a shock.

At the same time, Chiara Lubich taught us to live the present moment, wanting to do only what God asks us to do. Therefore we want nothing other than His will and to seek together –

precisely by listening to each other and trying to understand the needs of all – to hear together what God wanted to tell us through this circumstance. In doing this, first of all we changed all the programs, thinking always not only of the needs of the people who were supposed to participate in the programs, but also of the needs of those who would perhaps suffer economic losses from the changes, who would experience upheavals; there were many things of this kind.

We did this and did it joyfully, without letting ourselves be overwhelmed by the situation. And now we are seeing that it was all in God's plan, because it has led us to greater simplicity in life, to reviewing our lifestyles, to a greater sense of moderation when deciding whether to buy something now or not. We have put off acquiring something we had planned to buy, delaying or deciding against it entirely in order to make that sum of money available for more immediate needs.

It led us to seeing how all our families are and how they are coping at the moment. Many of our people, like others, have lost their jobs and don't know how to manage. This has brought about a more complete, open and transparent communion of goods among all. So we have communicated more about the various needs but also about what Providence has sent us. Truly we can say that Providence has shown us once again that it is true, that it is a reality, that the Father sends what is needed to his children if his children want to live for him and in mutual love.

So, in a way, he has given us the light to see the driving force that moves us, this love which is the love that God has placed in our hearts, not as focolarini but as people, as human beings. For us focolarini, this light takes on many colours because it becomes love that leads to unity, a love that enables us to give our lives for one another and risk everything. This really is something that has energised the Movement throughout the world.

The Movement, like the Church, is also universal, so we suffered what our people in China were suffering, what those in America, the Middle East, everywhere, or in Italy were suffering. And we lived all these things together so that people who had more gave to those who had less. Aid has come from China, Korea, Japan, the Middle East and Syria. Maybe it was aid in terms of encouragement and good wishes, but everyone said that this great family that lives the Ideal left to us by our founder, Chiara Lubich, wants to be one. Through unity we want to help the world become one.

From an interview with Alessandra Giacomucci for the Ecclesia ([Radio InBlu](#)) column, 8 May 2020

