



*If we act as one people, even in the face of other epidemics that threaten us, we can make a real impact. [...] May we find within us the necessary antibodies of justice, charity and solidarity. We must not be afraid to live the alternative – the civilization of love. [...] In this time of tribulation and mourning, I hope that, where you are, you will be able to experience Jesus, who comes to meet you, greets you and says: “Rejoice” (cf. Mt 28:9). And may this greeting mobilize us to invoke and amplify the Good News of the Kingdom of God.*

**Franciscus**

***LIFE after the Pandemic*, by Pope Francis  
Preface by Card. Michael Czerny, SJ**

In the early months of 2020, Pope Francis frequently reflected on the coronavirus pandemic as it took hold of the human family. Collected here are eight significant spoken and written texts dated from 27 March to 22 April. To whom did he speak, and how? What did he say, and why?

Beyond their specific occasions, these eight texts could be read together as a single development of his thought and as a rich message to humanity. This collection has two objectives. The first is to suggest direction, keys, and guidelines for rebuilding a better world that might be born from this crisis of humanity. The second objective is, in the midst of so much suffering and bewilderment, to sow hope. The Pope clearly bases this hope on faith, « because with God life never dies ».

We begin with the *Urbi et orbi* messages, the title of a major papal address of long tradition. Twice in 17 days, Pope Francis solemnly addressed and blessed the city (*urbi*) of Rome, of which he is Bishop, and the entire world (*orbi*): on 27 March, an

occasion without precedent, at the extraordinary prayer of adoration in St Peter's Square; and on 12 April, as traditionally on Easter Sunday.

The *Urbi et orbi* invites all humanity to listen just as inclusively as did *Laudato si'* in 2015 – « I wish to address every person living on this planet » – and *Querida Amazonia* in February 2020 which spoke « to the People of God and to all persons of good will ».

Though applying strictly only to two, the *Urbi et orbi*, in some way, characterizes all eight texts in this collection about the COVID-19 crisis. They speak to the needs and suffering of people in various local situations in the Pope's very personal, heartfelt, committed and hopeful manner. They are also truly universal, not only because the virus menaces everyone without discrimination, but especially because the post-COVID-19 world must be for everyone to shape. These eight texts show Pope Francis's warm and inclusive approach. It does not reduce people to bits to be counted, measured and managed, but binds everyone together in humanity and spirit. And then with no less warmth and inclusivity, the Pope challenges everyone – no matter how high or humble – to dare to do good, to do better. We can! We must! « From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God's blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace ». The *Urbi et orbi* invites heads of state and government, the world's decision-makers, « those in positions of leadership », the privileged who belong to « a small part of the human family [that] has moved ahead, while the majority has remained behind ». The Holy Father questions and challenges « all who have responsibility in conflicts » and occupy a place at « the table of economic power ».

« I encourage political leaders to work actively for the common good », Francis declares, and many countries have in fact shared information, knowledge and resources. At the same time, the Pope's gratitude and affection go to « all who work diligently to guarantee the essential services necessary for civil society, and to the law enforcement and military personnel who in many countries have helped ease people's difficulties and sufferings ».

In this unique collection, Pope Francis also hears and sees many who are usually kept silent and invisible. On Easter he wrote to the grassroots movements or organizations of the informal or popular economy. « Our civilization ... needs to downshift, take stock, and renew itself. You are the indispensable builders of this change that can no longer be put off ». And in a brief message, « I now want to greet the world of street newspapers and especially their vendors, who are mostly homeless, severely marginalized, unemployed ». This is probably the first time such people have ever been taken into account, much less greeted respectfully, and he continues: « In these days, looking at the poorest can help us all become aware of what's really happening to us and of our true condition ».

Addressing each and everyone directly, not from on high or in the abstract, Pope Francis reaches out with fatherly affection and compassion to make his own the suffering and sacrifice of so very many people: « May the Lord of life welcome the departed into his kingdom and grant comfort and hope to those still suffering, especially the elderly and those who are alone. May he never withdraw his

consolation and help from those who are especially vulnerable, such as persons who work in nursing homes, or live in barracks and prisons ». And the family album goes on: « doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, religious men and women » and « fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers ... showing our children, in small everyday gestures, how to face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze and fostering prayer ». He sympathizes: « How difficult it is to stay at home for those who live in tiny, ramshackle dwellings, or for the homeless! How difficult it is for migrants, those who are deprived of freedom, and those in rehabilitation from an addiction ». And « I think of all the people, especially women, who multiply loaves of bread in soup kitchens: two onions and a package of rice make up a delicious stew for hundreds of children. I think of the sick, I think of the elderly [and of] small farmers and their families who work hard to produce healthy food without destroying nature, without hoarding, without exploiting people's needs ».

So what does the Pope say, and why? At the highest level, one « alternative is the selfishness of particular interests and the temptation of a return to the past, at the risk of severely damaging the peaceful coexistence and development of future generations »; and with this comes the « danger that we will forget those who are left behind. The risk is that we may then be struck by an even worse virus, that of *selfish indifference* ». Let us « be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us » and recognize ourselves « as part of a single family and support one another ». « The time has come to eliminate inequalities, to heal the injustice that is undermining the health of the entire human family! ».

The time has arrived to prepare for fundamental change in a post-COVID. In a handwritten note to an Argentinean judge, the Pope emphasizes: « it is important to prepare ourselves for what follows ». And in a recent interview not contained in this collection, recording his responses to the questions of a British journalist, he states that the « aftermath has already begun to be revealed as tragic and painful, which is why we must be thinking about it now ».

As members of one human family and residents of our only common home, a dangerous selfishness infects many more of us than COVID-19. « [We] have failed in our responsibility to be guardians and stewards of the earth. *We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair.* We have polluted it, we have despoiled it, endangering our very lives... We have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us ». Now, facing the pandemic, we have widely and vividly experienced our inter-connectedness in vulnerability. Much of humanity has responded to that vulnerability with resolve and solidarity. We have proven that we can do it, we can change, and it is now for us to translate those traits into a permanent conversion of resolve and solidarity to cope with the larger and longer-term threats.

The time has also come to reflect on economic activities and work. Just going back to what was being done before the pandemic may seem the obvious, practical choice, but why not switch to something better? Why reinvest in fossil fuels, monoculture farming and rainforest destruction when we know they worsen our environmental

crisis? Why resume the arms industry with its terrible waste of resources and useless destruction? The Pope is « worried by the hypocrisy of certain political personalities who speak of facing up to the crisis ... but who in the meantime manufacture weapons ». Surely, we need “arms” of a different sort to fight disease and ease suffering, starting with all the equipment needed for clinics and hospitals worldwide. Let us courageously think outside the box. After what we have already been through this year, we should not be afraid to venture out on new paths and propose innovative solutions.

The work of care certainly requires recognition, support and innovation. The pandemic has shown how fundamental and strategic care is. However, in many countries it is an ignored sector: wages are low, hospitals are understaffed, shifts are heavy, proper contracts and benefits are missing. Many caregivers are informal: « working on your own or in the grassroots economy, you have no steady income to get you through this hard time ». Many are immigrants. Why do employees in other sectors that make a much less important contribution earn vastly more than care workers? Moreover, valuing care work would significantly improve the situation of women, since they are numerically predominant in this sector -- all the more reason why care work should not be marginal. Let's show the same operational agility demonstrated in successfully locking down the virus in rehabilitating and enhancing the entire care industry.

This logic should extend to the whole informal sector. « Many of you live from day to day, without any type of legal guarantee to protect you ». These are the workers with the least protection during the lockdown, even though many are just as essential as those with steady jobs. « Street vendors, recyclers, carnies, small farmers, construction workers, dressmakers, the different kinds of caregivers: ... and the lockdowns are becoming unbearable ». The Pope asks us to show courage in innovation, trying out new solutions and setting out on new paths.

Looking ahead, let us read the signs that COVID-19 has brightly displayed. Let us not forget how loss of human contact during this time profoundly impoverished us when separated from neighbours, friends, co-workers, and especially family, including the utter cruelty of being unable to accompany the dying in their last moments and then mourn them properly. Let us not take togetherness for granted in the future but rediscover it and find ways to strengthen it.

Challenging and changing current industries, recognizing non-formal work and fortifying the work of care are now on the public agenda. « My hope is that governments understand that technocratic paradigms (whether state-centred or market-driven) are not enough to address this crisis or the other great problems affecting humankind. Now more than ever, persons, communities and peoples must be put at the centre, united to heal, to care and to share ».

By now we understand that *everyone* is involved and implicated because of COVID-19: inequality, climate change and poor governance threaten everyone. We should also understand that changes must be made to the paradigms and systems that put the whole world in jeopardy. Our life after the pandemic must not be a replica of what went before, no matter who used to benefit disproportionately. « Let us show

mercy to those who are most vulnerable; for only in this way will we build a new world ».

COVID-19 has allowed us to put selfishness and competition to the test, and the answer is in: if we continue to accept and even demand ruthless competition among individual, corporate and national interests where the losers are destroyed, then the winners will ultimately lose along with the rest because this pattern is unsustainable at every scale, from the microscopic virus to ocean currents and worldwide atmosphere and supplies of fresh water. A new era of solidarity would have all humans on the same plane of dignity, each taking responsibility and contributing so that all, oneself and others and future generations, may flourish.

Together with vision, commitment and action, Pope Francis has demonstrated how prayer is fundamental for redirecting our gaze in hope, especially when hope becomes tenuous and struggles to survive. « How many are praying, offering and interceding for the good of all. Prayer and quiet service: these are our victorious weapons ». While leading the world in adoration on 27 March, the Holy Father taught that to pray means:

- to listen, to let ourselves be troubled by what we are living, to face the wind and the silence, the darkness and the rain, to let the ambulance sirens disturb us;
- to recognize that we are not self-sufficient and therefore to entrust ourselves to God;
- to contemplate the Lord's body in order to be permeated by his way of doing, to dialogue with him in order to welcome, accompany, support as he did;
- to learn from Jesus to take up the cross and together with him to take on the suffering of many;
- to imitate him in our frailty so that, via our weakness, salvation enters the world; and
- to look to Mary, *Health of the People and Star of the stormy Sea* and ask her to teach us to say "Yes" every day and be available, concretely and generously.

Prayer becomes the way to discover how to become disciples and missionaries today, embodying unconditional love in widely varied circumstances for every human being and every creature. This path can lead us towards a different outlook on the world, its contradictions and its possibilities, it can teach us day after day how to convert our relationships, our lifestyles, our expectations and our policies towards integral human development and the fullness of life. Therefore, listening, contemplation, prayer are an integral part of the struggle against inequalities and exclusions and for life-sustaining alternatives.

Pope Francis says to every reader of this collection, every community and society, *Urbi et orbi*: « I pray for you, I pray with you. I want to ask God our Father to bless you, to fill you with his love, and to defend you on this path, giving you the strength that keeps us standing tall and that never disappoints: hope ».

## **LIFE after the Pandemic**

### **Index**

	Page
Preface <i>by Card. M. Czerny, SJ.</i> .....	3
Why Are You Afraid? <i>Urbi et orbi Address during the Extraordinary Moment of Prayer,</i> <i>27 March 2020</i> .....	17
Preparing for Afterwards Is Important <i>Letter to Roberto Andrés Gallardo, 30 March 2020.</i> .....	25
Like a New Flame <i>Urbi et orbi Address – Easter, 12 April 2020</i> .....	27
To an Invisible Army <i>Letter to Popular Movements, 12 April 2020</i> .....	35
A Plan to Rise up Again <i>The original text written in Spanish was published by « Vida Nueva »</i> <i>on 17 April 2020</i> .....	41
Egoism: an Even Worse Virus <i>Extract from the Homily, Sunday of Easter (or Feast of Divine Mercy),</i> <i>19 April 2020</i> .....	51
To the World of Street Newspapers <i>Letter, 21 April 2020</i> .....	55
Overcoming Global Challenges <i>Wednesday Audience Catechesis on the Occasion of the 50th Earth Day,</i> <i>22 April 2020</i> .....	57