Columns
Coronavirus



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by Shanti Tirkey

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on March 24 that we would have a nationwide lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic, lasting until April 14 — and then extended several times.

Hearing this, I had an inexpressible feeling inside — but from that moment onward, I felt the seriousness of the coronavirus, the worldwide destroyer.

For me, there is no problem as I am in a safe place, by God's grace. But for other ordinary people and those living in poverty, it is a painful and hard time. I empathize with them and pray to Jesus, who suffered grievously, to bless and take care of them.

It was the first time that I have experienced a global feeling of sadness and solidarity, not only for the people of my country, but for the world's citizens who are affected by COVID-19.

The lockdown in India has affected our whole system of life — physical, emotional, educational, social and spiritual.

I now understand better how saints of yesteryear thirsted for God and longed for the Eucharist, especially when they faced hard times like the natural calamities or pandemics of their time. It is great to recall how they faced those trying times, and rendered their service to affected people with faith, courage and love. Those saints who have shown us the way reignite in me the love of my own mission.

About our spiritual or religious activities due to the shutdown: The irregularity of the holy Mass these days has given me an empty feeling and a longing to have the eucharistic celebration.

As I am a religious, I am privileged in many ways. We can have Mass on Sundays and other important days in our convent. But what about the other faithful? They have online services. And some in remote areas without internet, not even that. Online! Who would have thought that one day we would be forced to attend online

Mass?

The educational board announced that we would have online classes for students. Again, the students in remote areas have a problem, as they have no schools with the latest technology or other facilities that can help them to access online learning opportunities. We need to think about how to solve this.

These days, from morning to night, our community is spending more time with the Lord. If there is no Mass, we have a Communion service; from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. there is eucharistic adoration; from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. we have universal prayer and the holy rosary.

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All our prayers and petitions are for the coronavirus patients, doctors, nurses, health workers and the safety of every individual in this universe. We pray for patients fighting COVID-19 through sickness; for the doctors and nurses fighting to treat it; for scientists fighting it through research; and for ourselves fighting it through prayer.

We also take precautions in our community, by following all the rules recommended by the government and the doctors, like social distancing, sanitation, wearing masks and maintaining healthy immune systems.

Since in our community there is sufficient space to maintain social distance, the other sisters and I occupy ourselves in paperwork and in keeping the surroundings clean. All of us take care of our premises. So far, we have enough food provisions for all.

Since it is a quite long lockdown, I think people will be longing to attend the holy Mass. I am sure hereafter we will all take part in the eucharistic celebration and other prayers in the church with more devotion and love!

But it might also happen the other way for those lazy ones who think online prayers are enough, or that we can pray without going to church. It may become a habit for them.

Lockdown is the time to read, reflect and learn to live our lives better. Someone gave me the "full meaning of lockdown." I liked it when I read it, and would like to share it here:

L — Listen to God's voice and reflect. Let go and let us trust in God.

O — Obey his word and his teachings.

C — Call on God's name and be calm.

K — Know what is the purpose of all this.

D — Dwell in his presence. Do not panic.

O — Offer a prayer for everyone's safety.

W — Wait and be patient; this too shall pass.

N — Nurture our relationship with him.

During this time, we meet only with our family members and neighbors — and in town areas, we might not even know our neighbors. So lockdown can be a life lesson for me to speak much and relate with the creator. By this lockdown, we automatically meet and speak less to creatures but we meet and speak every moment to God — telling him about the pathetic situation of our world today.

It is in silence that we learn the ways of God. It takes time to acquire the wisdom of God.

The global health crisis is teaching us to be patient and love one another sincerely. God's ways are mysterious. I believe the almighty God will free us from this pandemic in his mysterious way. Until then we trust him.

[Shanti Tirkey is a Salesian Sister of the Kolkata Province in India. She is currently serving in the Auxilium Convent School, Bandel, as teacher and vice principal; she is also in charge of boarders and is vocation promoter for her province.]