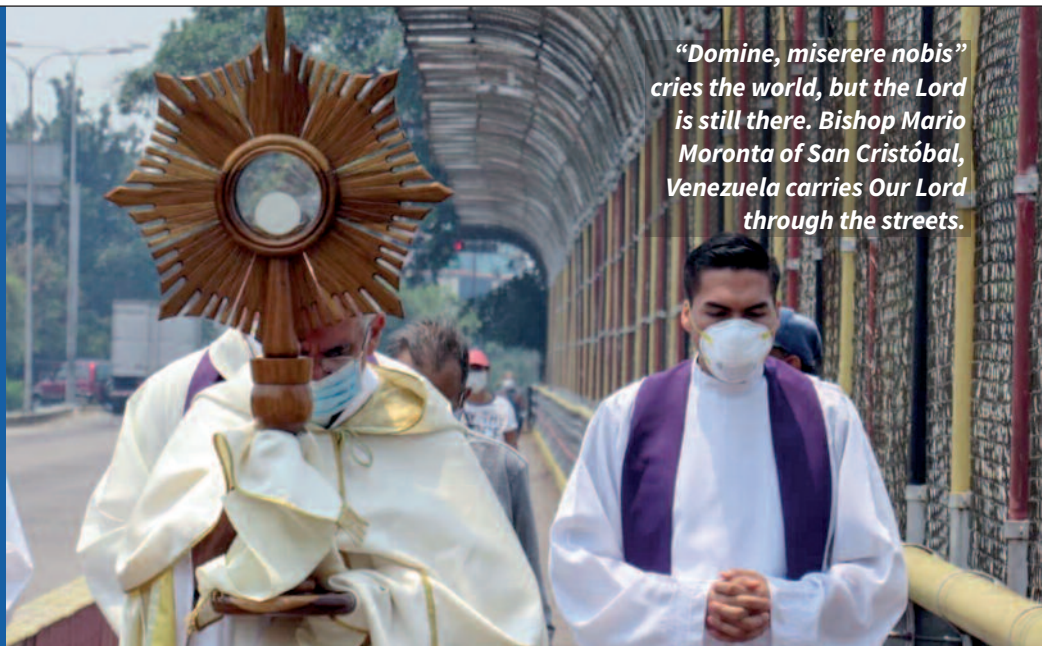


“Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: ‘Do not be afraid.’”

Pope Francis, Prayer before the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing on 27th March



“Domine, miserere nobis” cries the world, but the Lord is still there. Bishop Mario Moronta of San Cristóbal, Venezuela carries Our Lord through the streets.

Dear Friends,

2020 will no doubt go down in the history books as the Year of the Coronavirus. Nevertheless, it is not the virus, but God who determines the course of human history and directs it towards the good. Over the course of the millennia he sent prophets to point the way to salvation. Finally, he sent his Son to redeem the world and so that we could become children of God (cf. Galatians 4:4-5). But even after this great turning point in history, God has never ceased to help us through his saints.

Today he is even sending the Mother of God – and sending her to every continent – in order to sustain us in our great need. That is why the current era is called the Marian Age. Contrary to all the predictions of the scientists, Mary is promising us a future filled with joy and peace, although at the same time she does not conceal the fact that people are in need of purification and that painful situations lie ahead. She has shown us simple means for combating disaster – means that everyone can employ: wearing a medal, faithfully reciting the Rosary, reconciliation, consecration to her Immaculate Heart,

reading Scripture, making personal sacrifices out of love, frequenting the Sacraments.

The Marian Age began with a medal. In 1830, in the Rue du Bac in Paris, Our Lady appeared to a simple nun, Sister Catherine Labouré. She spoke to her of the painful times that lay ahead for the world. “All will seem lost”, she told her and revealed to her

intertwined with the Cross. Beneath this were the two wounded hearts of Jesus and Mary. Then Sister Catherine heard these words: “Have a medal struck according to this image. Those who constantly wear it and repeat this short invocation with devotion will experience the special protection of the Mother of God.” In 1832 the first 2,000 medals were struck, at the very time when cholera was raging in France. There were countless miraculous healings and conversions – so many, in fact, that the medal quickly became known as the “Miraculous Medal”.



“Today He is sending the Mother of God... to sustain us in our great need.”

an image for a medal. It portrayed Our Lady standing on the globe with hands outstretched, the serpent crushed beneath her feet. On her hands were rings from which emanated rays of light. Sister Catherine heard these words inwardly: “These rays are the symbol of the graces obtained by Mary for mankind.” Some of the rings emitted no light, however. Our Lady explained: “These are the graces you forget to ask of me!” Around the oval image were the words in gold letters: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee!” Then the image turned round. On the reverse side were 12 stars and the letter ‘M’

Dear Friends, during this month let us, like St John, take Mary into our hearts and homes so that she may reign within us as our Mother and Queen. If we do, then a new era, a new Pentecost, will dawn for us.

My grateful blessing on you all,

P. Martin M. Barta

Father Martin Maria Barta
Ecclesiastical Assistant



“Why are you so afraid?”

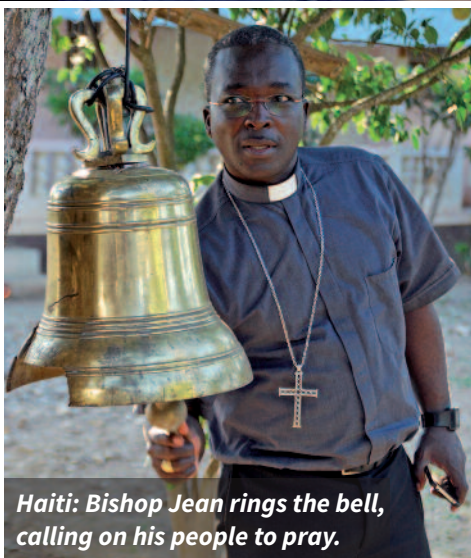


Bulgaria:
Franciscan Friars
at prayer.

“Cum Petro per Mariam ad Iesum” – with Peter through Mary to Jesus – this was always the path to God taken by Christians throughout the ages. It is no less so during this pandemic.

The virus has shaken the world. Like a sudden storm, it has upended all our certainties. The situation is like that of the disciples in the boat, when Jesus asked them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mk 4:40). The gestures of loving concern are a living response offered by all those whom we have helped for so many years – providing for their most basic needs and their service of God and neighbour. For example, the Sisters of Saint Charles Borromeo in the Philippines have been going out, offering food parcels for the poorest families living in quarantine behind their walls. Or the “Small Christian Communities” (SCCs) in India who, along with their bishops and deacons, are giving water, protective masks and hand sanitiser to the needy in the streets. Or Sister Magdalena in Kiev, Ukraine, who is visiting the sick and elderly. Or Bishop Désinord Jean in Haiti, ringing his church bell and calling on the faithful to plead to God for an end to the pandemic.

So many shining examples of loving charity! In Haiti, the people themselves have nothing; over half now live below the poverty threshold and four out of five Haitians are unemployed. In the poorest country of the Western Hemisphere, the outbreak of COVID-19 could be catastrophic. The situation is little better for the poor in India. Sister Christin Joseph, who heads the SCCs, is organising the response to the coronavirus crisis and the Indian government lockdown: “We have introduced



Haiti: Bishop Jean rings the bell, calling on his people to pray.

a special family prayer initiative. Every evening at seven, the families gather in their own homes and pray the Rosary in solidarity with coronavirus victims all over the world,” she says. She knows that most of these Christians are day labourers without any social security and the lockdown has taken what little they had. Many are looking anxiously to the future. And yet, their faith is still alive. The same response of faith has come from priests all over the world; they have risked their lives ministering to COVID-19 victims, even to the point of death. They believed. The disciples in the boat cried out in fear: “We are perishing”, for their faith was weak. But, after the Resurrection, they strengthened one another. Peter and Our Lady were the visible pillars of the young Church – and they continue to be so today. Those bearing loving witness to their faith in this crisis are like invisible pillars – these pillars are of course our brothers and sisters in Christ. ●



Ukraine: Sister Magdalena comforts a patient.



India: masks and food parcels for the families.



Mercy, according to the Heart of Jesus

“Evangelisation is the primary mission of the Church. The history of the Church is essentially a story of evangelisation.” This statement – by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1979 to the Latin American bishops in Puebla, Mexico – reflects the view of all the popes of the modern era.

Since then, the countries of Latin America have drawn up a succession of new plans and ideas for evangelisation, at the heart of which there is always the encounter with Christ. In the apostolic vicariate of Nuflo de Chavez in **Bolivia** they have drawn up an

ambitious five-year programme for catechists to “proclaim the mercy of the Church according to the Heart of Jesus” and so strengthen the spirit of Christian community. At the same time the vicariate’s pastoral commission has devised a Bible course. It has attractively illustrated materials in order to appeal to people without basic education, especially in rural areas. The programme includes regular meetings and days of reflection. But prayer is also central, as without prayer, nothing will succeed. We are helping with **£8,500**.

In **Peru** the prelature of Chuquibambilla

has produced a simple handbook for families as part of their programme of ongoing formation for catechists. It explains how to read the Bible (i.e. in silence with hearts open to what God is saying to us through the text), and how not to read it (like a newspaper, or a horoscope, or indeed an intellectual puzzle to be solved). It contains practical tips for Christians, and an informative and useful introduction to the Bible to help deepen their faith – the new evangelisation! We are supporting the entire programme of this cash-strapped prelature, high up in the Andes, with **£13,900**.



Bolivia: praying and learning together – a sister working with catechists.



Peru: ongoing formation for the laity – at an altitude of 15,000 feet.

Brazil

Cycling to beat the sects

They call them “Cenáculos”, or Cenacles: house-based study groups. They are a bulwark against the sects in Africa but even more so in Latin America.

Cenacles originated in Brazil with the spiritual community “Eis aí tua mãe – Obra de Maria” (Mary’s Work). They generally comprise around 10 people, who meet together in a family home to pray together and intently study the Sacred Scripture. A thorough knowledge and understanding of the Bible, combined with a Catholic way of living, is urgently needed, particularly in Latin America, where so many sects are leading people away from the Church with their mixture of faith and superstition, piety and fantasy. In the Cenacles, the Catholic faith is truly lived. And more than this – it is being spread by word of mouth. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”, says Jesus (Mt 12:34).

In Brazil there are already around 6,000 such house-based study groups, and almost 3,000 in Africa, and now in Europe and the Middle East too these Cenacles are spreading their faith-renewing and charitable activities. Today the “Obra de Maria” in Brazil numbers some 2,800 overwhelmingly young members. They include priests, seminarians and consecrated laypeople. They cycle to their prayer groups, bringing the books, hymn books, Bibles and candles with them. Up till now all of this has been funded by donations from a travel agency. But now, given the global crisis, the agency is facing bankruptcy. But the costs continue to mount for the training of the course leaders and catechists, the



Strengthening faith: the young apostles of the “Obra de Maria” are keeping the Cenacles going.

teaching materials and the bicycles and motorcycles that are needed. They need help to keep the wheels of this Gospel outreach turning. We have already promised **£10,400** for a hundred bicycles and five motorcycles.



When one member suffers...

During his special moment of prayer and *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, “For the city and the world”, Pope Francis said: “Like the disciples in the Gospel, we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realised that we are in the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us needing to comfort one other.”

This is a time of communion – the Communion of the Saints, a communion of love. “For none of us lives for himself and none of us dies for himself,” writes Saint Paul in his Letter to the Romans (14:7). Starting in Asia, sweeping across Europe, engulfing America – like a slow-motion tsunami – the wave of suffering has overwhelmed the countries of our benefactors. It has prompted a counter-wave of love from all over the world: “We are praying and keeping vigil for the doctors, their

patients and all those who are now fighting for their lives,” write the contemplative Redemptorist Sisters in Lviv, Ukraine. Along with the Carmelite Sisters in Sarajevo, Bosnia, they thank all our benefactors and are “praying for God’s mercy for all who are suffering during this time, especially those infected with the coronavirus and all who are fearful and fighting for their lives”.

From the ruins of the earthquake in Haiti and bomb-blasted Aleppo, Syria, from the convent cells of the Poor Clare Sisters in Bosnia and the Carmelite Sisters in Nigeria, from places of destitution in India and poverty-stricken regions in Latin America – from everywhere, messages are pouring in, offering comfort and spiritual support. They testify to the living spirit of communion, and the truth of Saint Paul’s words: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.” For, “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:26-27).

The contemplative Sisters in Sofia, Bulgaria, write: “During this extremely difficult time, we are more than ever conscious of just how greatly we depend on one another, how much we need one another. We are all together, one body. We Sisters, hidden from the eyes of the world, strive to live our lives in such a way as to be the heart of this body, so that the grace of God may act through us and flow into every member. We pray for you every day.”

None of us lives or dies alone. These Sisters, in their “fortresses for God” – as ACN founder Father Werenfried called them – are praying to overcome the pandemic. “Every day, we pray and plead with God for the health of our benefactors and their families



Ukraine: Sister Jana gives a thumbs up.

and for an end to the pandemic,” write the Sisters of the Greek-Catholic convent in Veliky Birky, Ukraine. “We are pleading with God for those in suffering and fear, for those in anguish and those who are sick, for the doctors and all those who are working to overcome this pandemic. May the Lord bless them and may the Immaculate Mother of God grant them her protection.”

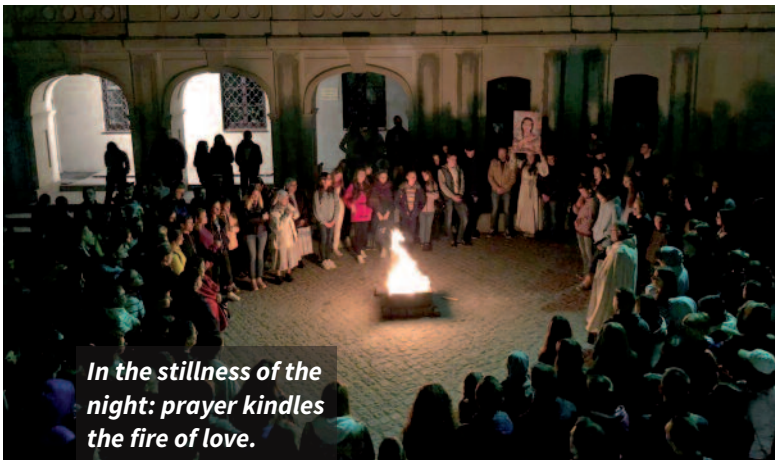
The many letters, phone calls and emails we have received are testimony to this wave of prayerful sympathy, like links in a chain of prayer that spans the world, the loving embrace of God, the reflection – the mirror – of his Love.

ACN has announced a more than £4 million package helping Priests and Sisters, caring for the vulnerable, who have lost their sources of income due to the coronavirus crisis.



Philippines: in the cross is our salvation.

God is always close



In the stillness of the night: prayer kindles the fire of love.



"Lord, my Strength.": meditating on the witness of the Saints.

For many Christians today such things as processions, pilgrimages, solemn liturgies and night-time adoration have been banished to the past by the coronavirus... but they will come back some day. What has never ceased, however is prayer itself, silent contemplation, all alone before God.

Many young people in Ukraine today are still buoyed up by their memory of last year's encounters with God, and they are eager to repeat them again this year – if the authorities and the restrictions resulting from the coronavirus will allow. At any rate, the bishops' conference of the Roman Catholic Church in the country is going ahead and organising Marian pilgrimages and retreats for young people. Franciscan Bishop Kawa, the man responsible for organising them, is expecting some 400 young people. The running costs – for board and lodging, travel costs and technical equipment – are £2,400. We have promised to help with **£1,800**.

It will be money well spent, for the results from last year are most encouraging. For example, Oleksandra writes about her experience of night-time adoration: "I'm a

drummer", she says. "I came with my band. I was particularly moved when they brought in the icon of Saint Joan of Arc, who is my Confirmation saint. The lights went out, and the candles were lit, one by one. Our bass guitarist Andrij played an amazing solo number – it literally gave me goosebumps. Then they played the song 'Lord, my Strength'. It went right to my heart. I felt the presence of all the twelve saints they presented, not just Saint Joan. We all prayed, all the young people. One of the really moving moments was when the boys prayed for the girls and the girls prayed for the boys, that there will be vocations, priests and religious sisters, ready to give their lives in the service of others."

And Karina, who was involved in the organisation of the event, writes: "A night of watching and praying helps decisions mature.

Bishop Edward Kawa: the young are dear to his heart.



Putting together an event to help people open their hearts and souls requires a great deal of detailed preparation. The organisation was all very hectic, but everything worked out well and many people came. I thank the Lord for helping them to sort the wheat from the chaff in their hearts during this blessed night. We will see the fruits in due course; it will be a good harvest."

In so many places the coronavirus is forcing people to adopt social distancing. But God is always close. We are helping Ukraine's Church to keep it that way – with £182,800 for pastoral programmes in 2019 alone. ●



A procession through the town: they will return in the future.



Christ speaks to us all: prayer vigil for young soldiers.



For Our Lady no road is too long: a youth pilgrimage.



God hears, and helps

Father Andrew runs the missionary parish of Saint Michael in Makeni, Sierra Leone. As he tells us, he has already had to forego “countless” trips to the remotest outstations of his parish. Without a car, such journeys are impossible. He says that it is hard to find words to describe this situation, but one thing is certain: “Vehicles continue to be a most effective means of evangelisation”. He turned to us for help in his time of need – and now, on behalf of his fellow clergy and parishioners, he wants to thank you “with all his heart” for your support. “We are so grateful that you have said yes to God’s will”, he writes “for He has deigned to hear our prayers for help with a means of transport.” Indeed, God hears, and God helps – and we have been permitted to be his instruments on this occasion.



Thomas Heine-Geldern,
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

The coronavirus pandemic has gripped the world for a couple of months now. There is growing uncertainty and alarm; people are seeking consolation and reasons to hope. Is this not precisely the moment to examine ourselves and ask if we truly trust that we are safe only in God’s hands? This trust is strengthened and deepened through the intercession of the Mother of God, and so we may, and must, turn again and again to the Blessed Virgin Mary for her intercession. I learnt the following prayer from my wife’s family, and have made it my own:

*“Virgin Mary, help us now,
Mother of God’s mercy Thou.
Thou art mighty, through God’s power,
Heal and save us at this hour.
Where man’s help no more avails,
Thy compassion never fails.
When we thy children turn to Thee,
Thou dost always hear our plea.
In our time of greatest need,
Mother, to our prayers give heed.
Virgin Mary, help us now,
Mother of God’s mercy Thou.”*

During this troubled time, let us turn again and again in prayer to the Mother of God and seek refuge in her protection. And please, at the same time, let us not forget our brothers and sisters in the suffering and persecuted Church, whose need is still as great as ever!

Thank you, as always, for your understanding and your generosity!

Thomas Heine-Geldern

Need, love and thanks – your letters

Appeal for prayer at the time of the Coronavirus

Please pray for all those whose well-being and peace have been disrupted...may they rest in the knowledge that God is in control and is THE source of abundance and wisdom in our lives and the lives of the leaders He has willed to be in charge.

A supporter in the United States

For their heroic efforts to help in Iraq

Please accept this donation. I am aware your efforts must go to those in most critical need. However if possible I would like this donation to go to the work of the Dominican Sisters in Iraq as I’ve been deeply touched by their heroic efforts to help the people there... May God bless all those who are working and praying for those who are suffering in such terrible and unjust situations.

A supporter in Canada

He has shown us the way

Thanks be to God, for God himself has helped

us on our Christian path. He has given us Father Werenfried van Straaten, for example, to show us the way. In supporting him, many people – like my father – have discovered their own wider Christian vocation and lived it. In this way they gain a deeper sense and experience of being a member of the one Church, even to the ends of the earth.

The bishop for youth, Switzerland

Our masters

“The poor are our masters”, says Saint Vincent de Paul. All of us who try to help Christians in need by their prayers and donations should feel inspired by these words and say “The persecuted Christians are our masters”. Thus ACN becomes the humble servant of these suffering Christians, who are our brothers and sisters.

A supporter in France

In a nutshell...

What we give does not make us poor.

A supporter in Austria

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Our address: Aid to the Church in Need, 12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA. Please use the Freepost envelope – it saves you money and helps us. If you give by standing order or direct debit or have sent a donation recently, please accept our sincere thanks. This Mirror is for your interest and information.

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