
Coronavirus Covid-19. Card. Sako (Baghdad) to Italy: “A common prayer tonight against the dragon. Joined by many Muslims”

“Confronted by the dragon represented today by the Coronavirus, we hereby extend to Italy our deepest friendship and ecclesial communion, in the form of continuous prayer. We are united with all the Italian people. The people of Iraq have not forgotten the immense solidarity and closeness shown by all of Italy in 2014 when ISIS invaded Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, which forced more than 125,000 Christians to flee the country.” Speaking to SIR from Baghdad, Card. **Louis Raphael Sako** reaffirmed the adhesion of the Chaldean Church to the Rosary prayer promoted by Italian Bishops (CEI), in communion with Pope Francis, to be recited this evening at 9 p.m. Every family, every believer, every religious community is invited to display a small white cloth or a lit candle by the window. “This evening we will pray the Rosary in unison with the Italian Church and with Pope Francis to eradicate this scourge”, the Cardinal said. He pointed out:

“A large number of Muslims are praying with us.”

But the prayer marathon in Baghdad and Iraq already began this morning, when “we celebrated Mass for Italy and for all those affected by the virus in the world,” the Chaldean Patriarch told SIR. “At 5:00 p.m. (3:00 p.m. in Italy) we will return to pray the Rosary, this time inviting all the faithful - and there are thousands of them every day - to connect to our social media channels to participate. Then again at 11pm, (9pm in Italy) we will join with the Italian Church and Pope Francis to recite the Mysteries of Light. The faithful will place a lit candle on their windowsill or display a white cloth. **Many Muslims will join us and recite a prayer against the virus that I composed.** Many Muslims have written us to remain united in this difficult time. The virus affects everyone and we must respond together with prayer, each according to his or her own faith.” **The Patriarch's prayer.** This is the prayer composed by the Cardinal in SIR's translation: “Lord Almighty, our Father and our hope, Thou knowest the difficult and dangerous times we are going through because the coronavirus is threatening the lives of human beings all over the world. We are also undergoing other political, economic and social difficulties that are harmful and hurtful to each and every one of us. Please, O Lord, do not leave us alone to face all these risks that threaten our lives. Abide with us, protect our loved ones and all men from all evil. O Lord, bestow upon us your fatherly care, protect us from coronavirus and other deadly diseases, guard us and bless our health. Grant our country blessings of peace, security and stability, for Thou art our only sanctuary. O Mary, our Blessed Mother, as always, we implore your motherly care in this critical time, do not forget us, for thou art our loving Mother. Amen”. **Against the dragon.** It is a prayer to join forces against the “dragon” which, His Eminence remarked, “forces us to live indoors. But we must transform this time into an occasion for rethinking and reflecting on our whole life, on our behaviour. This must lead us to undertake a renewed commitment to help whoever is in need - as much as we can in the present conditions.

Staying home doesn't mean being trapped by fear,

It is just a necessary precaution so that we may return to our daily activities soon, perhaps with a new spirit and in the knowledge that it is not all about eating, drinking or having fun. This time can be propitious to work on ourselves and to build a better life for ourselves, to make it a time of grace. And prayer can be of help to us.” **Tahrir Square.** The virus appears to have also blocked street protests ongoing since October 1, 2019. In fact, in the past few days leading activists of the Tahrir Square protest in Baghdad and other cities have been deciding whether to suspend the protests. It is also an opportunity for the new Prime Minister, the Shiite from Najaf, Adnan al Zurfi, appointed only two days ago by the President of the Republic Barham Salih, to take action. He has been tasked with forming

an interim government with a view to holding free elections within a year. *"A strong figure - said Card. Sako - I'm sure he will work well and carry out the necessary reforms"*. The new premier also promised "to step up efforts against the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic, reinforcing crisis management in full." "In Iraq, the Coronavirus outbreak caused 12 deaths and 174 cases of infection. These figures were provided by the government which - Cardinal Sako said - are probably underestimated," *"The population is not yet fully aware of the pandemic and the risks that it poses. A large number of people who, in their simplicity, believe that the Coronavirus is a punishment from God and therefore accept everything without taking precautions to avoid the contagion."* **Church recommendations.** The Chaldean Church recommended the faithful to remain at home and put in place a number of measures to counter the spread of the virus: "funerals will be held without the participation of the faithful but only with close relatives. The corpse will be blessed and buried, postponing celebration of Mass to the end of the emergency. Priests are invited to bring the Eucharist to those who request it, ensuring that every means of prevention is taken,." The situation on the border with Iran, which registers with Italy one of the largest outbreaks of the virus, appears particularly worrying. "No measures have been taken to cope with the spread of the pandemic," said Card. Sako - The borders with Iran are still open in some places because it is impossible to control all of them. On top of this, the critical situation of the health system and the economy makes the Iraqi context extremely severe. **If we are alone we will inevitably lose this battle. Never before has it been so important to pray and remain united."** .

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