
Coronavirus Covid-19. Fr Patriciello: "The Pope's closeness is a beautiful thing, praying with him an immense grace".

Today, Friday, March 27th, the Church will live an "extraordinary moment of grace": at 6:00 p.m., Pope Francis will celebrate a special prayer on the parvis of St. Peter's Basilica, facing an empty square, to raise a plea to God, at a time "when the world is on its knees because of the pandemic", to "live this time of suffering and fear with faith and hope." The Holy Father will then impart the Urbi et Orbi Blessing, accompanied by the opportunity to receive plenary indulgence. SIR contacted Father **Maurizio Patriciello**, parish priest of Caivano, a town in southern Italy, to reflect on this difficult period that the world is experiencing from the perspective of a Region, Campania, that is facing the spread of the contagion with great anxiety. **Father Maurizio, in these hours of discomfort how important are these moments of prayer with the Holy Father?**

Feeling the Pope so close to all of us at this moment is a beautiful thing,

we need to look up to him, all believing and non-believing men and women of good will. *Even though tonight the Pope will be facing an empty square, we know that that square is crowded, perhaps more crowded than during the most significant events of John Paul II's pontificate in Saint Peter's, such as the Jubilee of the year 2000.* Pope Francis knows that many people are suffering, not only in their bodies but also on a psychological level. Many fragile people are starting to break down and need to discover in him the good father who intercedes with the Father in Heaven. All this from a strictly human and psychological angle. From a religious perspective, we all recognize the importance of prayer. Jesus said that something great always happens when people come together to pray. Tonight with the Pope the Church will pray all over the world and we can expect God's intervention. Some Christian theologians are uncomfortable with the fact that all of us priests are celebrating Masses online, arguing that this emphasis on prayer stems from the idea that the epidemic is a punishment from God and through prayer we are asking for that punishment to be removed.



[What is your opinion? It's not true, that's not the correct interpretation: this virus that is tormenting us is not a punishment from God. Jesus invited us to pray: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Jesus told us to walk on water when it is humanly impossible. Next Sunday we will read in the Gospel that a dead man returns to life and Jesus weeps with the sisters of Lazarus sharing their pain.](#)

[God has certainly not punished us, He is beside us to help us withstand this tragedy.](#)

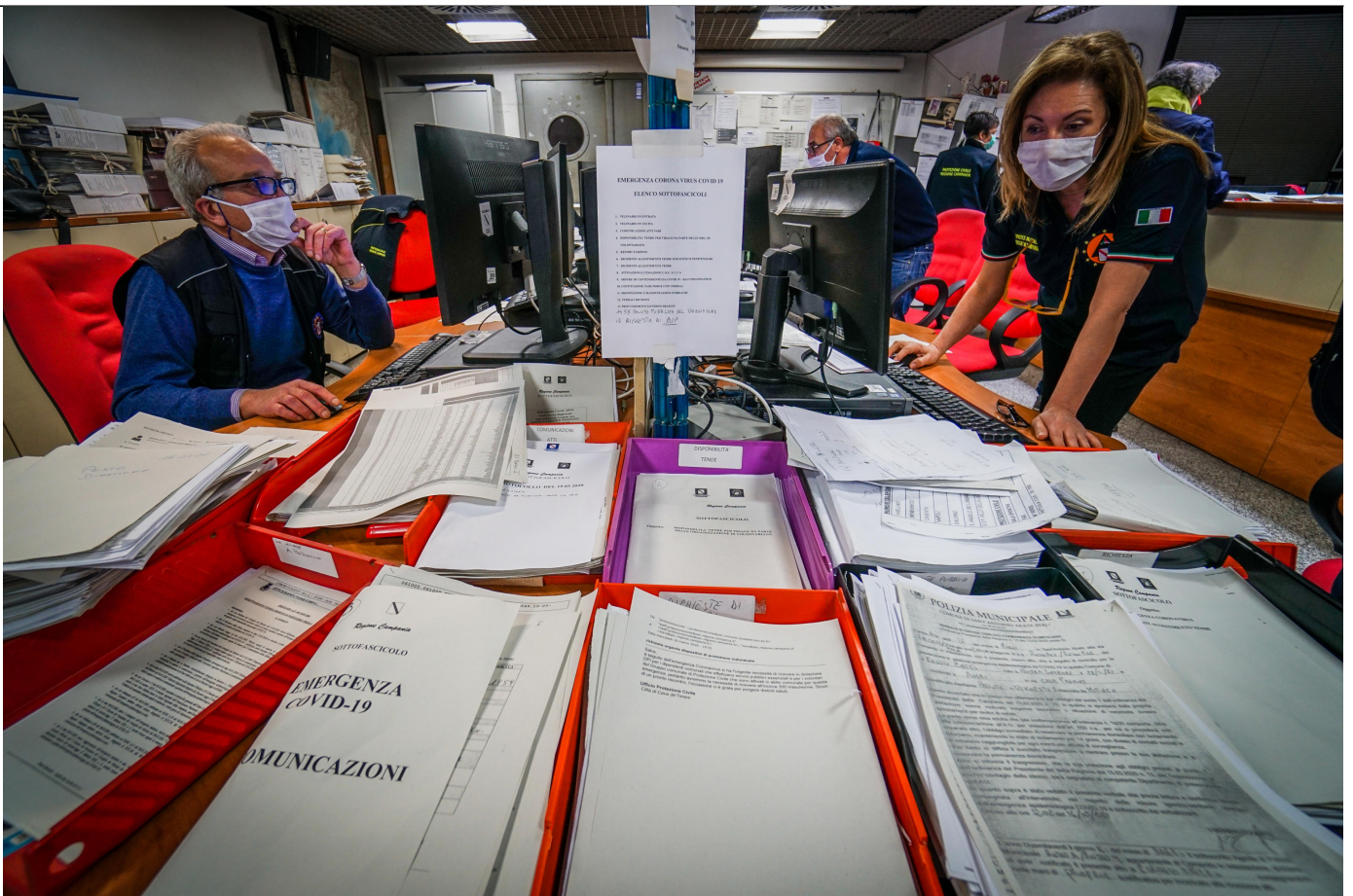
[In the Gospel of the Annunciation, before leaving Mary the Angel reminds her that nothing is impossible for God. The Church asks and God always listens to our prayers even if His answers are not those we might expect. We continue to pray. To do so together with the Pope is an immense grace. We need him, we need our bishops. This morning they will be praying for the dead in our cemeteries, including the cemetery of my parish in Aversa.](#)



Fear of disease is accompanied by the heartbreaking way in which people are dying... Indeed, the saddest aspect of this pandemic is to die inhumanly, without a person beside you, and to be brought to the graveyard alone, with family members locked inside their homes, unable to say their last goodbye.

It's the most painful aspect.

This should make us reflect on the many values that we tend to take for granted. Yet nothing should be taken for granted, everything is a gift. Most of us probably never thought of thanking water, air, regarded as natural things. But perhaps nothing natural exists, we are immersed in the supernatural, we are all a miracle and our life is a miracle from the first moment, and now it is slipping through our fingers. *The moment with Pope Francis tonight will be beautiful. With us, he will be praying for the pandemic to end and he will invoke our God, the Father who is in Heaven and who has never been unkind to us. This gives us great joy and great hope.* **Today the desire to pray has grown stronger...** This happens when a man is faced with the mystery of death... I entered the priesthood also because I had worked ten years in a hospital as a paramedic. I remember that one day I went to the hospital in the morning for my shift when a young man a few years younger than me had just been admitted, he got a high voltage shock in the workshop where he was working. Despite the attempts to save him, he died. Everyone reacted in a different way, some had a cigarette, some made coffee. I stood behind the screen next to the dead body and imagined that that young man had woken up like me, washed like me, went out to work like me and would never have imagined that those were his last hours. So, I asked myself, "Lord, where is he now? Is he living somehow?" *The mystery of death is an immense pain that must not be wasted. Now that we are perceiving it with greater intensity, with greater anxiety, many people raise their gaze to heaven and say, "Lord, help us.*



You are a parish priest in Caivano, but before then you worked as a nurse. Given the disastrous consequences of the epidemic in the North of Italy, where health care is efficient, are you concerned about the South? I am worried because health care here is not comparable in any way to that of the North.

God forbid that what happened in Bergamo should happen here, it would be a massacre.

When the President of the Campania Region, Vincenzo De Luca, raises his voice, he is doing the right thing not only because he is aware of the seriousness of the disease but also because he is well aware that our health care system cannot cope with a potential surge of infections like in the North. That's why we pray day and night. The dramatic aspect of this pandemic is the number of people who are infected and need treatment, but there is still no medicine, there are no more beds available in Intensive Care Units.

It's inhumane to have to choose which patients should be saved.

I pray for doctors and nurses not to have to make such choices. And if the disabled were to be discarded from treatment, it would be horrendous. If we undertook this course of action once this war is over, we would be left with splinters inside our flesh. Accepting this as a fact only one month after the outbreak of the epidemic is frightening. I can hardly imagine how difficult it must be for our elderly citizens to live through this tragedy. They almost feel ashamed to survive, to be taken to hospital, perhaps taking the bed of a younger patient. This is unfortunately due to dramatic cuts in public health in the past, which thereby favoured private health. That kind of policy will need to be thoroughly thought through in the future. **Have you considered returning to the ward as a nurse in the ongoing emergency?** I thought about it, but in this emergency we have to help others. When Irpinia was hit by the earthquake, I knew that the Lord was telling me to go. So I did everything. I

could as a volunteer. Today I feel that the Lord is asking me to stay here. I know that my duty is to love. How is it fulfilled? I could give a helping hand in hospitals, but since I haven't worked for many years I could be more of a burden, or I could stay here and pray. And this is what I have done: every day I celebrate Mass online, followed by 5/6 thousand people. Even though it is painful to celebrate alone in front of a mobile phone. And then I remember that no more than fifty people attended Mass before. *Everything contributes to the good of those who love the Lord. Humanity reaps the fruits of what it sows, but God does not chastise. He calls us to life. He does not want the death of the sinner. He wants him to convert and to live. The Lord knows how to bring out the good from any situation.* If the grain of wheat that has fallen to the ground does not die, the spike of wheat will not grow: now a new humanity can be born from the thousands of grains that are falling to the ground because of the coronavirus. This misfortune, for those who survive, will divide existence in a before and an after, as happens with war.

I hope that nothing will be lost from so much suffering, from so many tears, from so much anguish. And that a new, better humanity will be born.

Gigliola Alfaro