

Inner Freedom: A Bridge of Connection with God
Reflecting on the effects of COVID-19 on the UST Community
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For the reader who curiously approaches to read these lines, attracted by the notion proposed in the title, I humbly propose to accept ideas that flow from one's inner experience, which to this day, continues to fight against spiritual chains and social to freely abandon themselves in the wise hands of God.

The last days have exposed the human fragility that continually leads us to think about our pilgrimage in this world; since we are only passing through, as John XXIII emphatically recited it on several occasions and in his successful diary of a soul. This transience, evidenced by an invisible and silent enemy like Covid-19, fills us with fear due to the uncertainty of a future that escapes from the controlling imagination of each human being, who claims to have the security of an illusion that is broken. with a sneeze. Yes, with a sneeze, a greeting, a kiss, or a conversation with an acquaintance, the security of a life disappears, to the point that what "seemed necessary" is no longer. Our fragility, in moments of crisis, leads us to focus on the essentials for living: water, food, medicine and health. But when even the basics disappear, then the time comes to "appreciate" that the only thing we have left is only God.

The social isolation caused by the covid-19 pandemic has led us to see the destruction of our "American way of life", to the point that we are forced to remain at home as "prisoners", with the authorization to receive classes online (online courses), and even with the prohibition of not going to Church, hindering a way to feel close to God through the sacramental life that nurtures our inner world.

What is this way of life? A prison? How long should we live like this? What will happen to us if this quarantine lasts for months? These questions have frequently arisen in recent days, and the answers are grim and often hopeless.

However, moments of adversity become opportunities that God uses to make us grow in our personal relationship with Him. God observes our reality, not only as a distant spectator, but also as an empathic participant, since by assuming our nature, He has experienced what it means to be sick, hungry and thirsty, suffer and die. But through these moments, He jointly perceived the human and divine reality of a relational God who faithfully acts in human vicissitudes that lead us to lose hope with the false illusion that the voice of "world" that says "the governments are in control of the situation." The true control is in the hands of God who is omniscient and acts in the complex situations of catastrophe and misery, to later give life from the ashes. This is the paradigm of the cross of Christ that through misery comes resurrection, and therefore through pain, God creates a new creation according to his divine design. For this reason, in our Christian tradition, the cross of pain overcomes the misery of death to give life and joy, and for that reason we can rightly affirm *crux vincit et crux regnat* in our present life.

The paradox of the cross and the resurrection also leads us to reflect on the notion of the "time" that

elapses between one event and the other, that is, the "three days" that separate death from resurrection. Jesus resurrected on the "third day", and this powerful statement implies that the state of death or misery has an end, it is temporary and limited, since in the end the power of God makes everything new, eliminating the power of death and darkness. This period of pandemic, similarly, is not eternal, however we are scared by the fact that it will last a long time, but in the end God will give us his "third day", in which everything will be new, and joy will abound. But then, this question could arise: What do we do while we live prisoners in our houses because of fear and quarantine?

One response would be to "appreciate-perceive-understand" each day of our confinement with the "eyes of the spirit", a mental effort that implies our modern challenge, since this is the psychological and spiritual space where "interior freedom" has no chains physical and where "everything" becomes a meeting place with God. As long as we perceive the present reality with our physical eyes or materialistic and individualistic perception we will always be prisoners of our space and transitory circumstances, but the moment we make the effort to "perceive" our reality using the eyes of the spirit, all human reality acquires a connotation supernatural, since there is nothing in our world that escapes the presence and action of God (Psalm 139: 7-10). Consequently, each day of our social isolation becomes a "spiritual gym", where each of us can exercise in being spiritually free to grow in personal relationship with God.

It is in this type of circumstances where St. Paul becomes a true teacher of life. During his experiences in prison, Paul wrote several letters such as that of the Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, and what characterizes Paul, as reflected in these letters, is his "inner liberation", while suffering from being chained because of the gospel. As he writes the aforementioned letters, Paul focuses on "giving thanks to God" ("I thank God": Eucharist to Theo: Εὐχαριστοῦμαι Θεῷ Phil 1: 3) always and everywhere for the community, by faith, for the favor received, for the strength that God has given him during the times of trial, for good friends, for the prayers of the communities, etc.; In short, Paul's imprisonment became a moment of "reflection", "growth in faith", "proof of God's faithfulness" and a precious moment to continue "praying" and "giving thanks to God" for his daily action. By reading these letters from the Pauline experience, this pattern of behavior of Paul arises consequently, who being chained, that is, physically restricted like us today, assumes a vigorous attitude when seeing reality with the eyes of faith, remaining firm in the transience of adverse circumstances and in the stable certainty of God who is faithful. Reasonably following this exemplary behavior, Paul offers us a spiritual pattern of growth during this time of Lent and then Easter, which consists of cultivating our relationship with God through the "prayer", "reflection" and "meditation" of his words and works through Scripture, liturgy, Eucharist (online), practicing "spiritual dialogue" with the person of Jesus through our devotions or prayer methods, and "giving thanks to God always and everywhere" for the daily gifts that come only from Him. Only in this way can we grow in humility, allowing ourselves to be modeled by God himself, who as a good "pedagogue" educates us in the school of life and leads us to develop our potentialities for the good of his design divine that escapes our imagination.

Following this line of reflection, with pondering it seems appropriate to conclude with the same words of Paul who, after offering precious advice to Timothy, says to him: "But the Lord was with me and strengthened me, so that it would be fully fulfilled by me. proclaiming the message and all the Gentiles to hear, and I was delivered from the lion's mouth" (2Tim 4:17). Let us pray together with these Pauline

words, asking the almighty God to strengthen us in our mission in each of our lives to be instruments of his message and that He always deliver us from the mouth of the lion that haunts us. Amen.
