

THE Aquinas Way

Greetings, Theological Reflections and Spiritual Resources
during the COVID-19 Pandemic

"Even in our solitude, God is close to us, and we are never alone
for we all belong to the Body of Christ."

FR. GERARD TIMONER III, OP, MASTER OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS

BULLETIN I – APRIL 8, 2020

Greetings from the President

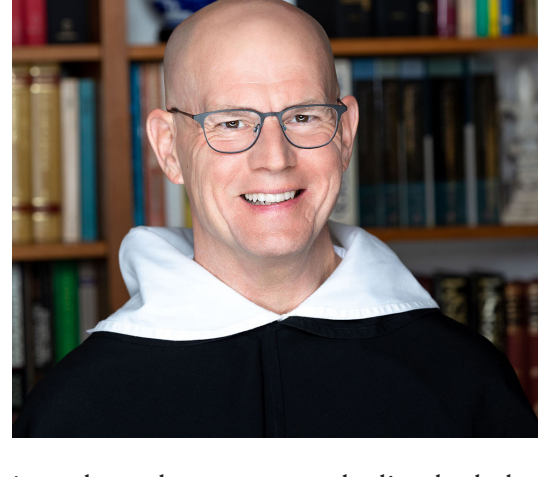
April 5, 2020
Palm Sunday

Dear Members of the Aquinas Community,

When I became the 10th President of Aquinas Institute of Theology on July 1, 2019, I expected that there would be many challenges in the coming months. A world-wide pandemic, however, was not on the list. And while this time is challenging on many fronts, I am grateful to the many people in the Aquinas community who have shown unwavering support, dedication and love for our school. This outpouring of assistance makes me ever more optimistic about our future together.

At this unusual time, we see that the way to be close to God is to remain physically distant from one another. We hope this short newsletter which we will send by email several times a week will serve as a way for us to remain connected to our students, alumni, donors and friends during this time of physical separation. In each edition, a member of the Aquinas community will offer a greeting and a theological reflection along with a list of various spiritual resources you might find helpful.

In many ways, the Lenten season seems well-suited for a world-wide pandemic. The austere Lenten practices of turning inward to confront sin and darkness, and the giving up of things we love so that we might grow in spiritual maturity seem to relate well to the sacrifices that are being asked of us now. For some, Lent has been a good framework to interpret the unprecedented disruption we are experiencing. But now, Holy Week is here, and we leave Lent behind and move into a new season; a season of celebration grounded in hope and



joy where the empty tomb dispels darkness and death. Perhaps hope and joy and celebration do not seem quite as well-suited as Lent as the backdrop of a world-wide pandemic. Many of us enter Holy Week understandably preoccupied; concerned about all the unknowns, worried about how the COVID-19 crisis will affect the lives of those we love, and fearful of its long-term impact on health outcomes and economic stability. And yet, ironically, despite our very real fears and worries, the Easter season is actually well-suited for a world-wide pandemic and the opportunity to celebrate what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is just what we need now.

The reflection that follows this note is the letter written to all the members of the Dominican Order on the COVID-19 crisis from Fr. Gerard Timoner, III, Master of the Order of Preachers. In his letter, Fr. Gerard reminds us that, "Even in our solitude, God is close to us, and we are never alone for we all belong to the Body of Christ."

Please pray for me, and for all the Aquinas community and be assured of my prayers for you.

In Christ and St. Dominic,

Fr. Mark E. Wedig, OP
PRESIDENT

FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Letter to the World-wide Dominican Family from Fr. Gerard Timoner, III, OP, Master of the Order of Preachers



ORDO PRÆDICATORUM
CURIA GENERALITIA

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?
The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?
For God will hide me in his shelter in time of trouble,
He will conceal me in the cover of his tent.*

Psalm 27: 1,5



Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Dominican Family,

As you know, after China, Italy is suffering gravely due to covid-19. Some members of the Dominican family in the north of the country have contracted the virus. Let us continue to pray for all the sick, those who care for them, those who are trying their best to find ways in overcoming the pandemic and its adverse effects.

Together with the brothers and sisters here at Santa Sabina, I wish to offer words of solidarity as a gesture of our nearness to one another at this time when common good requires "social distancing". Our mission is to build *communio* and yet in this time of crisis, we seem to surrender ourselves to *isolation*. Paradoxical as it may seem, keeping distance from one another means we truly care for each other, because we want to stop the transmission of the novel corona virus that has claimed the lives of many and has imperiled the lives and livelihood of countless people all over the world. We keep our distance not because we see our brother or sister as a potential virus-carrier, or we are afraid of getting sick; but because we want to *help break the chain of viral transmission*. When the healthcare system becomes overloaded, as it happened in the north of Italy, our health care providers will be forced to make difficult ethical decisions --- would a patient who is younger and therefore with longer life-expectancy be prioritized over one who is elderly? We hope and pray that we would prevent that from happening anywhere by doing whatever we can to prevent further toxic transmission. Here in Italy, as in other countries, it is painful for us not to publicly celebrate the Eucharist, the *sacrament of communion*, at a time when the people need it most because of *isolation*. And yet we have to endure this suffering in the spirit of human solidarity and communion, for "if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it" (I Cor. 12:26).

In this time of *quarantena en quaresima*, we are invited to pause and ponder the nearness of God to us. When public worship is suspended for the well-being of worshippers, we become keenly aware of the importance of *spiritual communion*. In these places, it is as though the people experience a prolonged "Holy Saturday" when the Church "abstains from the celebration of the Eucharist" meditating on the passion of the Lord and awaiting his resurrection (*Paschale Solemnitatis*, 73-75). In an experiential way, we are reminded of the hunger for the Eucharist of our brothers and sisters in remote areas who could participate in the Mass only once or twice a year. Now, more than ever, we need to find ways on how to break isolation, to preach the Gospel of love and communion, even in the "digital continent" (ACG Biên Hòa 2019, 135-138). We need to remind our people that Jesus remains near to us even as we hunger for the Bread of Life.

Let me recall what we know deep within our hearts. If we want to spread the Gospel, we must be with the people, be near to them! We must cross linguistic, cultural, even ideological boundaries to spread the Word of God. Conversely, if we want to arrest the spread of something bad like the corona virus, we must keep distance, we must refrain from personal encounter because any proximate encounter has the potential to spread the contagion.

The current pandemic clearly shows that for something to circulate, personal closeness and encounter is necessary. When this crisis is over, let us not forget the lesson: if we want the Gospel to circulate in our secularized world, the same personal closeness and encounter is necessary. I hope and pray that our centers of studies, parishes, and other apostolic centers would continue to become like an "airport", i.e., a hub where people deepen their knowledge and faith so that they too may positively "infect" everyone with the contaminating joy of the Gospel.

We continue to pray for the sick and those who care for them. Even in our solitude, God is close to us, and we are never alone for we all belong to the Body of Christ.

Your brother,

Fr. Gerard Francisco P. Timoner III, OP
Fr. Gerard Francisco P. Timoner III, OP
Master of the Order

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SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

Friarly.com

This project is a collaborative effort of the Dominican Student Brothers of St. Dominic Priory in St. Louis, Missouri. The COVID-19 resource page offers a number prayer and liturgical resources including the daily preaching by one of the Dominican friars.

<https://www.friarly.com/covid-19-resources.html>

Today's Word of Hope

Daily reflections during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis offered by Fr. James Marchionda, OP, Provincial of the Dominican Central Province of St. Albert the Great.

<http://opcentral.org/blog/category/a-word-of-hope/>

Reflections from Fr. Cristobal Torres, OP

Fr. Cristobal a graduate of Aquinas Institute of Theology and a friar from the Southern Province of St. Martin de Porres. He serves as University Chaplain at Barry University and offers a short daily reflection on the Barry University Campus Ministry Facebook page.

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CHURCH: Catholics Helping Us Reach Catholics at Home

This is a public Facebook group facilitated by Firebrand+ (created by Aquinas graduate, Jared Bryson, and his business partner, Katie O'Brien Pesh). The CHURCH group is a portal to see how people are sharing our faith in unique ways during this unprecedented time.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2421826451252058/>

"Spirituality for a Time of Scarcity" by Fr. Charles Bouchard, OP

Former Aquinas Institute President, Charles Bouchard, OP is the senior director of theology and ethics at the Catholic Health Association of the United States. This article, "Spirituality for a Time of Scarcity" was recently published in the National Catholic Reporter.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/spirituality-time-scarcity>

From Liturgical Press

- Complimentary access to the April digital editions of 'Give Us This Day,' a daily prayer resource with scripture reflections, inspiration from the lives of saints, and simplified morning and evening prayer.
<https://offers.giveusthisday.org/free-resources>

- Resources in English and Spanish called, 'Holy Week at Home.'
<https://offers.litpress.org/coronavirus-response-to-customers>

Please share your comments and suggestions with

Erin Hammond at registrar@ai.edu

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 8:38-39