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Other News

Elderly: in loneliness the coronavirus kills more

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the heart of this "unexpected and furious storm, we realized", as Pope Francis reminded us, "that we are on the same boat". Inside there are also the elderly. Like everyone else, they are fragile and disoriented. Our concerns and grateful thoughts go to them today, to return at least a little of that tenderness with which each of us has been accompanied in life and that the maternal caress of the Church reach each of them.

Their generation these days - difficult for everyone - is paying the highest price for the Covid-19 pandemic. Statistics tell us that in Italy more than 80% of the people who lost their lives were over 70 years old.

A few weeks ago, Pope Francis said that "loneliness can be a disease, but with charity, closeness and spiritual comfort we can heal it". These words help to understand that, if it is true that the coronavirus is more lethal when it encounters a debilitated body, in many cases the previous pathology is loneliness. It is no coincidence that we are witnessing the death, in terrible proportions and ways, of many people who live far from their families, and in truly debilitating and disheartening conditions of solitude.

For this reason, it is important that we do everything possible to remedy this condition of abandonment. This, in current circumstances, could mean saving lives.

During this special time there are many initiatives in this sense that the Church is putting in place in favor of the elderly. The inability to continue making home visits has led to finding new and creative forms of presence. Calls, video or voice messages or, more traditionally, letters addressed to those who are alone. Parishes are often engaged in the delivery of food and medicines to those who are forced not to leave the house. Almost everywhere, priests continue to visit homes to dispense the sacraments. Many volunteers, especially young ones, are working generously to continue or even begin fundamental networks of solidarity and care.

But the gravity of the moment calls all of us to do more. As individuals and as local churches, we can do much

for the elderly: pray for them, cure the disease of loneliness, activate solidarity networks and much more. Faced with the scenario of a generation hit so severely, we have a common responsibility, which stems from the awareness of the invaluable value of every human life and from gratitude to our fathers and grandparents. We must devote new energies to defend them from this storm, just as each of us has been protected and cared for in the small and large storms of our lives. We cannot leave the elderly alone, because in solitude the coronavirus kills more.

Those living inside residential homes deserve special attention: we hear terrible news about their conditions every day and thousands of people have already lost their lives. The concentration in the same place of so many fragile people and the difficulty of finding the protective devices have created very difficult situations to manage despite the self-sacrifice and, in some cases, the sacrifice of the staff dedicated to assistance. In other circumstances, however, the current crisis is the result of a care and therapeutic abandonment that comes from afar. Despite the complexity of the situation we live in, it is necessary to clarify that saving the lives of the elderly who live within residential homes or who are alone or sick, is a priority as much as saving any other person. In countries where the pandemic has presently had only limited consequences, it is still possible to take preventive measures to protect them. In those where the situation is more dramatic, it is necessary to take action to find urgent solutions. This affects the future of our ecclesial communities and our societies because, as Pope Francis recently said, "the elderly are the present and tomorrow of the Church".

In the suffering experienced by us all these days, we are called to see the future. In the love of many children and grandchildren, and in the care of those assisting and of volunteers, we can see in them, so to speak, the compassion of the women who went to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus is once again revived. Like them, we are scared and, like them, we know that we cannot help less than living - while keeping the distance - the compassion that He taught us. Like these women, we will soon understand that it was essential to remain close to those in need, even when it seemed dangerous or useless, confident of the words spoken by the angel, inviting us not to be afraid.

So let us join in prayer for grandparents and the elderly around the world. Let us gather around them with our thoughts and hearts, and when possible, let's act, so that they be not alone.
