

Laudato Si' 2020

Theme: "Everything is Connected"

A 9 day Retreat

16 – 24 May 2020



16 May 2020

Capuchin GEM (Green Environment Movement) – JPIC Office - OFM Capuchins

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace and Good.

To commemorate the 5th year anniversary of Laudato Si', we invite you to join us in a 9 day retreat.

Each day, we will provide you with materials from which you can find inspiration. We will end each session with a short reflection. All that is required of you is to provide yourself a few minutes each day to find a quiet place to read and reflect in peace.

For today, Day 1, our topic will be on the theme of Laudato Si' 2020: EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED. There are two materials for you to review and a short reflection in the end. Happy reading and God bless you always!

Office of the JPIC, OFM Capuchins

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED



Material 1: The COVID19 Wildfire!

According to WHO (World Health Organization) the first reported cluster of cases of COVID19 was on December 31, 2019.¹ In a matter of few months, it spread like wildfire throughout the world. As of May 15, 2020, the number of people who have died worldwide is 303,418 and the number continues to rise.²

Suddenly, humanity was faced with an unseen threat that showed us how much we are connected to each other. We realized that by going about indiscriminately, we cause the spread of the virus and increase the number of people getting infected and dying. Governments started asking the people to stay at home, keep social distances, wear masks and wash their hands. We knew that doing all these help save lives.

On the brighter side, it was noted that in some places where people stayed at home for a long time, there was a significant change in the environment. The skies became bluer and less polluted. The animals that were previously dispersed to the peripheries by industrial development were noted to slowly go back to some communities and explore curiously the empty streets. Some people had the feeling that nature seems to begin to relax and breath again.

However, as the pandemic wildfire continues, new problems arose. The longer the people stayed at home, the higher became the number of unemployment. Together with unemployment came an increase in the number of people losing their homes and not having anything to eat. The leaders of nations were faced with the dilemma of striking a reasonable balance between saving lives and saving their nation's economy. Fears, insecurities, depressions and anger arose from the growing confusion. Discontent and violence began to grow in many places.

When COVID19 touched the shores of Europe, Italy was severely affected especially in the region of Lombardy. On 9 March 2020 Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced a national quarantine in Italy. As of May 15, 2020, there were 31,368 COVID19 related deaths in Italy³ and 15,296 deaths in Lombardy.⁴

Glimpses of hope and inspiration

Two months after (4 May 2020), I e-mailed Fra Angelo Borghino, OFM Cap, the Provincial Minister of the Capuchins in Lombardy, asking him to look for brothers who are willing to share their experience in helping the homeless during the quarantine. The first brother who wrote back was Fra Riccardo Corti, OFM Cap, a Capuchin brother serving the poor at the Capuchin soup kitchen in Bergamo. In his letter he wrote:

Original Italian Text

Pace e bene, mi chiamo fra Riccardo e dal 2016 mi è stata affidata la GRAZIA e la GIOIA di VIVERE il mio essere FRATELLO presso la mensa poveri di Bergamo , "OPERA PADRE ALBERTO BERETTA".

Ogni giorno, da lunedì a sabato, accogliamo circa 160/170 persone, alle quali la PROVVIDENZA garantisce il pranzo quotidiano. Insieme a me, sostenuto dal supporto concreto e spirituale dei miei confratelli, ci sono un centinaio di volontari che si rendono disponibili a fare servizio di accoglienza e di distribuzione dei pasti. La mensa, affidata alla protezione preziosa e speciale del Servo di Dio padre Alberto Beretta, vuole garantire sicuramente il pasto, ma insieme, vuole anche dare la possibilità ai nostri ospiti di "sentirsi a casa".

L'emergenza "COVID-19" ci ha impedito di poter aprire le porte della mensa e così, dal 24 febbraio 2020 stiamo distribuendo il pasto nei sacchetti e, alle 11 alle 12, il

English Translation

Peace and good, I am Fra Riccardo and from 2016, I was entrusted the GRACE and the JOY of LIVING as a BROTHER at the soup kitchen of the poor in Bergamo, "OPERA PADRE ALBERTO BERETTA".

Each day, from Monday to Saturday, we welcome about 160 to 170 persons, to whom PROVIDENCE guarantees daily lunch. Together with me, sustained by the concrete and spiritual support of my confreres, there are a hundred volunteers who are available to offer reception and meal distribution. The soup kitchen, entrusted to the precious and special protection of the Servant of God Father Alberto Beretta, definitely wants to guarantee the meal, but in addition, it also wants to give our guests the opportunity to "feel at home".

The "COVID-19" emergency prevented us from being able to open the doors of the soup kitchen and so, from 24 February 2020 we were distributing the meal in bags and,

piazzale della Chiesa diventa luogo di incontro in cui i nostri ospiti ritirano il pasto nei sacchetti, nei quali c'è una vaschetta con pasta o riso, o carne e verdure, acqua, pane e, quasi tutti i giorni una bella fetta di colomba.

Mi piace condividere il fatto che alcuni dei nostri ospiti trovano ristoro e riposo nella nostra Chiesa ed è edificante vedere come alcuni di loro, in modo semplice e spontaneo, si mettono in preghiera davanti alla statua della Madonna o in ginocchio ai piedi dell'altare. Un giorno uno di loro era inginocchiato ai piedi dell'altare e, piangendo, affidava a Gesù le sue preoccupazioni. Da lì ho capito che i poveri sono maestri in umanità, ma anche maestri di preghiera, quella semplice, quella che ci permette di riconoscerci FIGLI AMATI.

Grazie alla preziosa collaborazione con CARITAS, PATRONATO SAN VINCENZO e SERVIZI SOCIALI del Comune di Bergamo, i nostri ospiti non sono lasciati soli nell'affrontare questa situazione.

Alla luce di questi mesi, che cos posso condividere? Innanzitutto posso dire che il cuore umano è infinitamente BUONO e, questa riscoperta lo potuta contemplare attraverso le tante persone che nonostante l'emergenza e la crisi, allargano il loro cuore e attraverso offerte economiche o generi alimentari, ci permettono di toccare la BELLEZZA di SORELLA PROVVIDENZA... e il bene che sta circolando è davvero tanto!!!

Ma la PROVVIDENZA si manifesta e si rende concreta anche attraverso segni meravigliosi di SOLIDARIETA' che i nostri ospiti hanno tra loro; sono davvero tantissimi e, tra i tanti vorrei ricordare due uomini che, vivendo in un edificio abbandonato, hanno accolto una persona che non aveva trovato posto per dormire, e ad oggi condividono quell'alloggio, con la speranza che possano trovare in futuro una soluzione migliore.

Abbiamo un fornaio che ogni giorno ci regala 180 panini freschi e, la mattina del 26 febbraio, all'ultimo momento ci siamo accorti che non avevamo pane a sufficienza; esco sul piazzale ed esso arrivare un signore con un sacco di pane, dicendomi che un fornaio l'avrebbe destinato per la nostra mensa... i 10 kg di pane sono stati sufficienti e ne abbiamo

from 11:00 to 12:00, the church square becomes a meeting place where our guests collect the meal in bags, in which there is a pan with pasta or rice, or meat and vegetables, water, bread and, almost every day, a nice slice of 'colomba' (*colomba di pasqua* is an easter cake).

I like to share the fact that some of our guests find rest and recovery in our Church and it is uplifting to see how some of them, in a simple and spontaneous way, pray in front of the statue of the Madonna or kneel at the foot of the altar. One day, one of them knelt at the foot of the altar and cryingly entrusted his concerns to Jesus. From there I understood that the poor are masters in humanities and also masters of prayer, the simple ones, the ones that enable us to recognize ourselves as BELOVED CHILDREN.

Thanks to the precious collaboration with CARITAS, PATRONATO SAN VINCENZO and SOCIAL SERVICES of the municipality of Bergamo, our guests are not left alone to face this situation.

In light of these months, what can I share? First of all I can say that the human heart is infinitely GOOD and, I was able to contemplate this rediscovery through the many people who, despite the emergency and the crisis, widen their hearts and through financial or food donations, enable us to experience the BEAUTY of SISTER PROVIDENCE ... and the good that is circulating is really significant!!!

But PROVIDENCE is manifested and made concrete also through wonderful signs of SOLIDARITY that our guests have among them; they are truly many and, among the many I would like to recall two men who, living in an abandoned building, welcomed a person who cannot find a place to sleep, and today they share that accommodation, in the hope that they will find a better solution in the future.

We have a baker who gives us 180 fresh rolls everyday and, on the morning of February 26, at the last moment we realized that we didn't have enough bread; I went out to the large square and a gentleman arrived with a sack of bread, telling me that a baker intended it for our soup kitchen... the 10 kilograms of bread was sufficient and we

anche avanzato!!!

Al termine di questa semplice condivisione non posso fare altro che dire GRAZIE a Gesù per avere il PRIVILEGIO di stare con i poveri, di essere loro fratello e compagno di viaggio.

Inoltre, chiedo preghiere per i poveri e per il gruppo di volontari che, pur essendo limitato per ovvie ragioni di sicurezza , continuano a prestare il loro servizio con impegno, passione e gioia!!!

Anche noi assicuriamo il ricordo nel bene e nella preghiera!!!

Pace e bene, **fra Riccardo**

also saved some in advance!!!

At the end of this simple sharing, all I can do is say THANK YOU to Jesus for having the PRIVILEGE of being with the poor, of being their brother and traveling companion.

Furthermore, I ask for prayers for the poor and for the group of volunteers who, although limited for obvious safety reasons, continue to serve with commitment, passion and joy !!!

We also assure you our good thoughts and prayers!

Peace and good, **Fra Riccardo**



Above: Fra Riccardo Corti, OFMCap (center) serving the poor during the COVID19 epidemic in Bergamo, Italy

Photo Source: YouTube video titled – Corona Virus Into the Red Zone by Sky News

¹ Source: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>

² Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-death-toll/>

³ Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

⁴ Source: https://lab24.ilsole24ore.com/coronavirus/en/#box_5

Material 2: Photogallery



Photos courtesy of Frei Edmilson

The photos above show Capuchin brothers in Brazil cultivating pesticide-free Creole seeds in their garden. They are doing this in order to rescue native seeds and pass them on to the families who work the land.

Solidarity with the people and with creation entails the realization that we all belong to one family with God as our Father. This filial affinity to God unites us to humanity and creation in a deeper way. To be part of a family is to share in the struggles and successes of each member. Their pain is our pain and their joy is our joy.

Reflections:

When Pope Francis celebrated Mass at the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines, a young girl, who used to live in the streets and later found a home in an orphanage, began to share but stopped halfway and cried. She asked in tears why the Lord allows children like her to suffer.

Later, Pope Francis told the crowd that the little girl expressed herself more eloquently through her tears. He told the youth before him that we need to learn how to cry. He said that unless we learn how to cry, it will be difficult for us to understand deeply the suffering of others.

To learn how to cry is to become aware that we are all interconnected. We realize that the suffering of others is also our suffering and that the joy of others is also our joy. The factor that connects all of us is our kinship with God as our Father. This kinship makes us brothers and sisters with the whole of creation and the whole of humankind.



Sometimes it takes a crisis to wake us up from our indifference and teach us that we are vulnerable and we need each other. Crises in life teach us to reach out to others in kinship and to face our challenges together. In this fraternal journey, we also realize that working together is not enough. We need a final element to complete the whole picture. We need to be reunited to God from whom everything came from and to whom all will return. God is the uniting factor of everything.

This fundamental realization of God as our point of unity, as our source and our final destination shows us the need to be reconciled to God as his children. From this point, we learn to listen with our heart and spirit. We learn to reach out in love. We learn to create oasis of love, joy and comfort amidst the darkness and pain in the world. From these oases we journey together towards the Father.

The soup kitchen in Bergamo and the Church piazza beside it became an oasis of love, solidarity, comfort and prayer for the homeless. It became a place where the homeless reach out to God in prayer and reach out to each other with love. It became a place of refuge amidst the threat of COVID19.

The garden of the Capuchins in Brazil was small but the brothers cultivated it patiently knowing that the seeds it will produce will preserve indigenous species of edible plants and provide food for those who till the land. The small Capuchin garden in the periphery is also an oasis of hope, universal brotherhood and life.

We too can create small oases in our convents, parishes, homes, communities and places of work. It can be a quiet corner with a pot of plant, an image that reminds us to pray and a spirit of fraternal love shared between us. Oftentimes, a simple pot of plant is sufficient to bring life to a rather dull and empty room. Nature has a way of reminding us of the Divine.

Psalm 19:1-4 tells us: ¹ *The heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork,* ² *day discourses of it to day, night to night hands on the knowledge.* ³ *No utterance at all, no speech, not a sound to be heard,* ⁴ *but from the entire earth the design stands out, this message reaches the whole world.*

Little things done with love for the rest of humanity and creation go a long way. When the apostles were asked by Jesus to feed the multitude, they felt helpless because they only had two fishes and five loaves of bread. But Jesus assured them that it was enough and he asked the apostles to instruct the people to sit down. God added what was lacking and five thousand people were fed on that day.

Every day is a journey towards the re-establishment of our divine dignity as sons and daughters of God. Jesus came to earth and reached out to the excluded in the hills and valleys of Galilee. He was the Emmanuel; God with us. He lived among us in order to lead us by the hand back to the Father.

The knowledge of our fraternal unity is just the beginning of the journey. From this point of realization, we need to walk hand in hand back to the Father. Let us not delay. The Father eagerly waits for us. With care and love, let us journey with the rest of creation back to His loving arms.

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