Dearest Ones,

We live in the time before Easter, the time of Lent. For many countries in our world, perhaps for all of them, this 2020 Lent is marked by the coronavirus pandemic.

So Patrizia wanted to share with the catechists of Italy some reflections that arise from our work of catechesis with children. To her and to me it seems appropriate to share them with all our Catechesis of the Good Shepherd “world.” Patrizia and I were children in the atrium with Gianna and Sofia; we grew up there with them and with our mother, and we became catechists. We both feel the joy of this prolonged and always very fruitful experience, and we want to share it with you.

Patrizia writes:

This morning various thoughts – reflections came to mind regarding recent events and about reading the “signs of the times” in the context of the Good Samaritan parable [Luke 10: 30-37]. In this light, we Italians could say that China is very near to us (“la Cina è vicina”). Some European countries, actually close to us and Christian, look on and close their borders not only to us, but even to our products too. Whereas China, a country so distant and different from ours, with its totalitarian, dictatorial regime, directed against Christianity as well, has made itself our “neighbor.” Not only has China cared for our “wounds” (sending tons of pharmaceuticals), but has also stayed “the night at the inn” (sending a team of doctors prepared to help in healing Italians in the dark night of the epidemic). And I thought about the final judgment, when God will say to the Chinese: “you cared for me,” and their answer: “When? We didn’t even know you…” What is there to say? The Kingdom of God is near, Parousia is under construction. May you have a good Lent.

Her next reflection follows:

This morning more thoughts came to mind. I was reflecting on the parable of the precious pearl [Matthew 13: 45-46] as we present it in Level III, and how we hold our gaze by “looking” only at the pearl and the pearls. We meditate on what the pearl is: the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus in the Eucharist, the Word of God….

So, reading the “signs of the times” in terms of this period of Eucharistic fasting, perhaps the precious pearl is the Word of God. And this morning the passage from the Bible that came to mind was, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Thus to be a temple of the Holy Spirit in these days means to respect our body and the bodies of others, each of whom is also a temple of the Holy Spirit, by putting
into practice the very restrictive measures in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, such as frequent hand washing, staying at home, not meeting anyone, not even friends, family....

Then what occurred to me in “looking” at the pearls that are to be “sold,” was the meditation on the space—time categories, that is, we are able to dominate space, but not time. However, what is happening in this period is that we can no longer be masters of space: we cannot leave home to go for walks, nor make trips, nor travel to catechesis courses here and there. Yet during this time we are, in some sense, closer to God in that we have become—in a small way, naturally—masters of time, the sole dimension of freedom left to us. We are, so to speak, prisoners in space, in which we were once masters, but we are able to move freely in time. At this point I remembered the “indirect aim” of the album outline of the parable of the precious pearl: to help in discernment, in developing the capacity to make choices. And so, given this freedom we have with respect to time, the single freedom which is granted to us during this period, we are invited to choose how we will spend “our” time. Is it to be an empty time? Or to be a time inhabited by a Presence—proven to us in the Word of God—who invites us to respect ourselves and the world? Because we and the world are here, we are called to be “the temple of the Holy Spirit.” And in this way we are writing the blank page, we are helping to build Parousia.

And again, in response to a catechist who wondered about the “meaning” of all this world tragedy, she tried to answer:

I, too, shut up in my house, find myself thinking like you, like everyone else... I think we have the Bible that reveals who God is and how God acts in history. Because, let’s always say it, without ever forgetting it, He is alive and present in history. All his actions are in history. History that is, therefore, our history, but above all God’s history, God’s plan that is unfolding towards God’s final resolution. And, as the Second Vatican Council declared, we must read the “signs” in this history. Perhaps we had forgotten about the outstretched arm and the strong hand of God; perhaps we had thought a lot like the Pharisee in Luke’s parable (18:9-14, today’s Gospel as I write this): that we, ourselves, were enough, that we were at the center of history, that what was important for us was not the mustard seed, that is essential for God. And, just as in the desert God educated his people, so perhaps we must, today, let ourselves be educated by God and see that his love is the love of the Father who corrects and adjusts our vision, while always supporting us, so that we may arrive soon and all together at the Parousia. All together and, therefore, not thinking only of ourselves and fighting only for ourselves. And perhaps the coronavirus gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves and answer ourselves: Who do we believe in... in the God of life? that God is near even though we are in the valley of darkness? that God’s promises, even if they are delayed, will still come true? that there are signs of the Parousia even now, today? And then your big question about loneliness at the moment of death or approaching death... What to think? I’m reminded of Jesus’ words, “The one who loves father and mother more than me...” (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26) and I read these words, in these times, as making us aware that God’s love is greater than human love and the presence of the Lord must be enough for us, otherwise the words we say: “The Lord is my Shepherd: I lack nothing” are not
true. Because, if we are united to Christ, we leave no one behind and we are, indeed, united to all, as we are all branches of one True Vine.”

And now two reflections of mine:

On the history of the Kingdom of God timelines hanging in our atria we can indicate where we are: we stand at the “blank page.” We don’t know what will happen tomorrow. But we are close to Easter, close to that day when Jesus announced the SENSE of his Passover, the meaning of his death and resurrection, taking bread and wine and making it, so to speak, his memorial in anticipation. There our Eucharistic liturgy was born. At this time, when it is forbidden for so many of God’s people to live it, it pleases me and helps me to remember and meditate on the profound meaning of the Eucharistic celebration. What do we miss if the celebration is missing? I think that what is missing is the “content” that is carried in the bread and wine, the content that is new every day, that “fruit of the earth and the work of human hands” that represents each one of us and the history that we carry forward, the whole history of every day...Each one of us is represented and is being offered in those gifts. This is the content over which Jesus says, "This is my body...", and then he goes on to say: "Do this...”. We can relate the term, “This,” that is repeated in the Mass with what we read in Eph 4:10-16, where it speaks of “filling all things... building up the body of Christ... professing the truth in charity... increasing everything... in proportion to the activity of each one...”. The Eucharist really "serves history”, makes it grow, carries it forward. In 1990, 30 years ago, during a whole month in the atrium with Sofia and the children of level III, we really tried to answer the question: "What purpose does the Eucharist serve in history? Well, let’s ask ourselves and, if possible, our children the same question. Although perhaps only with our imaginations, let’s do a work of “synthesis.” Let us imagine placing on the rug, in front of the three strips of history, a paten and a chalice... and wait to see what comes to mind to place next to them.

Also:

This year will be the first time since the Lord celebrated his Easter, that so many of his people—we can say almost all his churches—will not be able to make it the memorial! And immediately what comes to mind for me is that question that all three Synoptic Gospels report: "Lord, where / how [pou in Greek means both things] do you want us to prepare ...?". Alas. it will be the first time, after two thousand years, that this question will be our question, and I have asked Him to show each of us and all of us and all the churches, where and how we should celebrate. Now we must have the patience to wait. We just have to start asking Him, but He will be the one to tell us, to tell everyone. Truly the story will not end without each of his words being fulfilled (cf. Mt 5:18). This year, for the first time, the Churches are invited to ask the question: "Lord, where do you want us to prepare...?"
Patrizia and I embrace you.