

COVID 19 - Its Encounter with the Indian Subcontinent

The Corona Virus Pandemic which gripped the world in a manner no other catastrophe, calamity or crisis has ever done has its effects on the Indian sub-continent too. In the beginning when the pandemic struck China, Italy, Europe and America, India was better off due to the immediate “Lock down” declared by the government as a precautionary measure. Though it helped in the initial stage at present India is hit badly and it figures in the top ten countries with maximum number of affected cases according to today’s statistics 144950 with 4172 deaths.

The lock down was intended to flatten the curve of the Pandemic but it created untold suffering, fears, anxieties, insecurity, poverty, homelessness and loss of job and livelihood for lakhs of people especially the migrant labourers, construction workers and daily wage earners.

Participation in events like family gatherings, festivals, community worship, no matter what religion, praying together, marriages and funerals which are vital to our social culture were minimized or even disappeared overnight. These things overtook people with a shock. The hard hit with social distancing, are the old people living alone.

Schools were closed in the middle of the annual examinations; children returned home without harvesting the fruit of their labour. All schools, universities and other major entrance examinations had to be postponed and the students who had been looking forward to getting into various professional and university courses are losing their hope. This situation is creating serious psychological problems among the children and youth of our country. Though almost all the schools and colleges have started online classes for the students yet it has its own disadvantages as the poor have no access to these technological gadgets. The teachers and parents have learned to cooperate and use the modern technology very creatively to disseminate knowledge and engage the children in useful and productive activities. Children have learnt to manage their study better by themselves and parents too have time to be with the children and teach them. Many children are learning to help the parents in household chores, learning something new like cooking, painting, drawing, skills in mass media, composing poems, etc. They have also learnt to enjoy homemade and healthy food as junk food is not available.

Many are made aware of the shortness of life and the uselessness of riches. People use their talents and expertise to cheer people and to lessen their fears. Communal riots, religious fanaticism and all forms of sectarianism that affect a multi-cultural country like ours is not heard these days because the focus is how to save the world from the deadly virus. When we are faced with a common problem all distinctions disappear and humanity and service comes to forefront. The medical personnel, health workers, police, military personnel, political leaders, NGOs and volunteers really deserve our praise and gratitude for being in the front line through direct service to the Covid 19 affected people. In spite of India’s own vulnerability at this time of Pandemic, they are trying to reach out to many nations through medicines and by sending medical personnel to countries who expressed the need.

The situation in India has affected every sector of life and we, the SCJMs are no exception to it. Our main ministry being education, it is going to have a lasting negative effect. Since most of our schools

are in the village set up and for the poor, we cannot expect any fees from them not only now, perhaps later too. Due to the lack of facilities at home we are not able to reach out to all the students with virtual classes either. Every community and every individual Sister is trying to save the bit each one can.

On the one hand we see the lockdown as a curse as we see the struggles of the poor but on the other hand it is also a blessing. It has given us cleaner air to breathe, cleaner water, life and freshness in the nature and the melodious music and chirping of the birds can be heard. Families have come closer and are enjoying the company of one another as they stay at home. Many people have turned back to God and have given up depending on their own abilities and we have learned to live with the minimum. We have realized that for every pain and ache we need not run to a hospital and we have become more compassionate and generous.

For the SCJMs it was a time for inward looking and outward reaching out. Inward looking since it provided us with a lot of time to renew and refresh ourselves with spiritual food through online retreat, online short formative courses, besides the help and guidance sent by the general government, many more digital updates for the celebration of “Laudato Si” week, more time for prayer, online nine days Novena in preparation for the Feast of Pentecost, more time for communities to be together, just to mention a few. Outward reaching out is the need of the hour. If we open our eyes and look out we see only pathetic situations and people in need. Every community and as a Province we have tried to reach out to as many people as possible with ration for migrant labourers, construction workers, daily wage earners, lepers, in fact any one in need.

The Virus seems to stay on. Let us befriend it instead of seeing it as an enemy and a threat; perhaps, it has a strong message for us, to allow space for our planet to be free, to respect and recognize its contribution to our health and life; to develop relationships devoid of alienating factors like rich- poor; religion languages, race and caste which generate consumerist values and embrace human values like respect for one another and creation, peace, non-violence, equality, love and justice.

Srs. Elsy Paul and Divya Varghese



**Srs. Teresa Attupuram, Jessy Thomas & Juhi
at the Leper colony distributing ration**



Sr. Lucy Emmanuel (Jammu) giving ration



Sr. Regis & Mathur Community



Sr. Ruby and Parataspur community distributing masks and food stuff to the migrants going back to their places by road