

## Stories of Hope (COVID – 19 Pandemic)

The Corona Virus Pandemic had begun in China already in 2019, and slowly but steadily it engulfed the whole world. This virus entered India on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020, when a student who returned from Wuhan in China was tested positive in Kerala.

Before COVID 19 had its effect on the country, it was going through a terrible time due to the recently enacted amendment, the CAA (Citizens Amendment Act), NRC (National Registration of Citizens) and NPR (National Population Registration). In many parts of the country there was protest peace marches, sit in dharna, etc. but the hot spot for these activities was the national capital, Delhi. There was violence, burning of houses and shops, atrocities, killing, bloodshed, arson, looting, burning and the like. It was a particular community that reacted to the government and so they bore the brunt of it. Finally there was fear, anxiety, hopelessness, homelessness, etc.

In the background of these uncertainties, the country was suddenly gripped by the Corona virus pandemic, which called for immediate attention to prevent its spread and the need for preparedness to meet any eventuality. Overnight the Central Government announced 21 days lock down which left the people to find their own ways. Even at this seemingly hopeless situation God has not abandoned His people to despair. There were hundreds who reached out to these vulnerable people as torch bearers and a ray of hope. The SCJMs in Delhi Province has its own success stories to tell and continue to be a beacon of light for those who are groping in darkness.

1. **The riot victims:** Since the protest concentrated mainly to a particular area in the national capital Delhi, the Provincialate community felt the need to reach out to those suffering humanity who were driven away from their homes. All those homeless people were kept in a camp. The archdiocese of Delhi, the CRI, like minded NGOs and other volunteers had been thinking and planning as to how we could reach out to these people who were without even the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. They participated in all the meetings called by the archbishop and the CRI unit to chalk out a concrete programme of action.
  - ❖ Some of our Sisters expressed our solidarity with the people on sit in dharna, by being with them at the spot, along with other priests, religious, social activists, journalists and religious leaders.
  - ❖ A few Sisters (Srs. Teresa Attupuram, Rose Thomas and Jessy Thomas) personally visited the camps and spent time with the riot victims. They listened empathetically to their heart renting experiences, their fear, anxiety, losses, uncertainties, worries about their future, etc. They also counseled the people in their hopeless situation, especially by their loving and compassionate presence, by their words and deeds of kindness, tried to understand them in their pain and loss.
  - ❖ Since these people had absolutely nothing with them and they had to be helped with the basic necessities first, the Province reached out to them with financial help.

Though what we have done is like a drop in the occasion, our presence must have definitely been a ray of hope for the hopeless and homeless victims of inhumanity.

2. **The Corona Virus Pandemic:** We were aware of the virus spreading to other parts of the world, from China but never imagined that it would become a global crisis, engulfing the whole universe. Gradually the country realized the need for preparedness and preventive measures to ward off the virus from spreading. Since social distancing is one of the preventive measures, the government declared 21 days lock down which caused many other problems particularly for the migrant workers, construction workers, daily wage earners and other people on the margins. We have an angel, Sr. Lilly Thomas, who goes to the hospital everyday serving the sick and another angel, Sr. Jessy Thomas, who reaches her to the hospital since conveyance is not available, while all the others are home bound.

Since we are not directly involved in taking care of the people affected by the corona virus, we thought of ways of reaching out to the people affected by the lock down. We were witnessing heart rending sights on the roads in front of our convent where we could see thousands of migrants on foot, trying to walk hundreds of kilometers to reach their homes in other states. There were still thousands left behind without shelter and food. To this suffering humanity we could reach out in many ways. We really appreciate Sr. Lucy Jacob, our superior general's, concern for the victims of Corona Virus Pandemic which she expressed through phone calls asking the province to help the poor and affected people in whatever way possible. Her words and assurance of prayer was a source of encouragement and hope. Sr. Teresa Attupuram, the Provincial, had already sent out a message to all the communities asking them to reach out to the people on the periphery in whatever way they could so that no one goes hungry without food. Some of the communities had already initiated the work of identifying people who had nothing to eat. Soon all the other communities also found their own ways of being a ray of hope for the hopeless. 26 communities sprang into action immediately by:

- Distributing ration for those who had nothing to eat (the migrant labourers, construction workers, daily wage earners, and other people around our communities)
- Since our movements were restricted, we could not move out to go to the suffering people so, certain communities managed to provide the financial help needed
- Some other communities provided financial help for the critically ill patients for their treatment
- Certain communities joined hands with those who were providing food for the people who were sheltered in greater number in particular places by providing financial assistance.
- In case of need, till the school reopens, our school buildings will be made available for quarantine provisions

Under all these circumstances we were being Good Samaritans to all those who were in need without the distinctions of caste, creed, religion, etc. Our generosity, empathy, and solidarity with the affected people were sowing seeds of hope for the hopeless.

3. **Solidarity with our "Lifeline":** Adhering to the words of Fr. Triest who said, "Always accomplish your works of Charity in a spirit of Faith, with your eyes fixed on God"we turned to Him, trusting Him who is laboring with us in this broken world. It has given us time and opportunity to realize that it is a call to

renew our relationship with God, self, others and creation. It is a call to realize that creatures cannot be above the Creator, misusing the powers and capabilities given by God. It is a time to realize that we need to return to God, depend on Him and trust Him and let Him be the Master of everything. Therefore it calls for a new way of seeing, thinking, acting, planning, relating, and living with one another, being interconnected and interdependent on God, others and creation. It is an invitation to move out of our own self, cross the boundaries of caste, colour, creed, and religion and reach out to anyone in need with empathy and support. The realization that only the intervention of God can wipe away the COVID 19 virus from the face of the earth, we turned to God with outstretched arms, heads bowed and on our knees to implore His assistance by:

- ✚ Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, as many hours as possible, even 10 hours a day in some communities.
- ✚ Special Novenas for this intension
- ✚ Mercy Rosary only for this intention

The last month had been a time of intense prayer, not only for the corona affected persons and nations but also asking God for mercy upon us and the whole humanity for our sins, failures and short comings which has caused our Mother Earth to mourn under its weight. We are sure the Lord who labours with us during this world wide crisis will enable us to continue to be a ray of hope for all those who are in a hopeless situation.

In the depth of darkness when God seems concealed, the transforming light and hope of God is revealed through the committed, dedicated and loyal services of all in medical profession, the government servants, NGOs, volunteers, priests, religious, donors and many others whom our Fr. Triest would call as **“gods on earth, and angels of God”**. May God our Lifeline, continue to inspire us to walk in solidarity with the distressed people at this critical time of humankind.