

St Egidio during the pandemic

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March 27, 2020: in an empty St Peter's square, under a persistent rain, Pope Francis, all alone, in the midst of the pandemic pronounced words of intercession and encouragement for all humanity:

"We are not self-sufficient; on our own we will do down. We need the Lord as the ancient navigators needed the stars... He brings about calm in our tempests, because in God, life is never spent. The Lord summons us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and reactivate solidarity and hope".

In this difficult moment, prayer and the listening to the Word of God have united our communities in all parts of the world, all aware that "we are all in the same boat" and that we ought to remain united in order to save ourselves. The charism of St Egidio comes forth always renewed from the Gospel; Pope Francis described this charism with 3 P's: "prayer, (the) poor, peace". The present pandemic showed more evidently our fragility and our weakness, and helped us to respond with prayer, while remembering the Lord's questions during the storm: "Why are you afraid? Do you still lack faith?" This helps us to strengthen our faith and our commitment towards those who are suffering, especially due to this emergency.

Throughout the world, St Egidio made the effort to be close to the poor during this crisis; for us the poor are our daily companions and our preferred friends, because we are aware that in the poor we meet the Lord, as per Matthew 25. The first and most numerous victims of this pandemic were the old persons in retirement homes. They became even more isolated and in some cases, left without any medical care. Due to this situation St Egidio has published an appeal, 'We cannot have a future without old people'. This was done to stimulate a re-thinking with respect to new ways of accompanying old persons in need of help, and to find alternatives to their being placed in institutions, which, at times, proved to be lethal traps. During this period, while respecting the restrictions, we have accompanied our poorest friends, the first victims of this pandemic: we provided food for the homeless in our

dining halls and in the streets; we looked after the children from disadvantaged homes, and helped them catch up with their studies; we helped the sick. This not only gave rise to a network of help, but also moved many persons of good will to join us in this endeavour of solidarity.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has pushed onto the back burner many present and urgent problems: the ecology crisis, the refugees' drama; the many wars, etc. People are focused on themselves and on their health, while the terrible dramas of the world persist, and even increase.

During these weeks, St Egidio has continued its endeavour for peace. In particular, there was the commitment for the various peace processes, above all, the one in South Sudan, which ended with an agreement signed a few weeks ago in the headquarters of the Community in Rome. An important moment was the international Prayer Meeting for Peace, which was held at on October 20 in front of the Town Hall of Rome. Pope Francis and several religious leaders, whose numbers were limited due to the crisis, took part. The president of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella and other politicians, also took part. They were unanimous in affirming that "No one can be saved on his/her own – Peace and fraternity". This is the Spirit of Assisi that is also part of our Together for Europe; since we trust in God we find our strength in our diverse charisms and traditions, and we want to use this strength to help a world in crisis and to contribute toward fraternity among the peoples. We want to do all this well-aware that we can save ourselves only if we stick together. Thank you very much!