



Distinct Voice: Contemplative Seeing

Maria Teresa Retana (Philippines): ‘A “Misericordian” Response to these Difficult Times

The Covid-19 pandemic presents a great challenge to me as a principal of the Basic Education Department of Holy Infant College, Tacloban City, Philippines, a school owned and administered by the Religious Sisters of Mercy, and as a volunteer worker of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish, supervised by the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (*Redemptorists*).

The effects of this pandemic were felt by everyone abruptly and intensely and it has impacted on the world’s economic, social, political aspects and most of all our health. With the enforcement of strict home quarantine and community lock-downs, closure of some businesses, travel restrictions, banning of gatherings of people which caused limited time and space for interaction and socialization, I can’t help but ask, what is going to happen to humanity now?

God has showered me with bountiful blessings in my life, for which I am grateful. But I was confronted with uncertainties and my anxiety heightened when classes were suspended and flexi-work was implemented in our work place. Like everyone else, a major question occupied my mind: “*How will we survive?*”. Life then became very difficult. But when conditions worsened, I became more concerned with the relevance of my presence as a parish worker to this present situation. *In what way can I best live up to my calling as Misericordian? How can I respond to the needs of others and how can I experience a deeper connection with them?*

Despite this distressing and painful experience, I started seeing God’s presence in this crisis. I called on God in prayer with bended knees and kept on pondering His Words “*Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?*” (Mt. 6:26).

God can never be outdone in His generosity. The parish organized a relief operation for the most affected parishioners, such as senior citizens, drivers, laundry women and construction workers who rely on their daily income to provide for their families. Life has to go on, so that despite the struggle, I joyfully became involved in the many parish initiatives to reach out with compassionate heart to the most needy, including the conduct of counseling and mental health related activities. I realized that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy can still be shared even in the outbreak of this pandemic.

I am always grateful to God for the opportunity to be of service to others through mercy education and parish ministries. I profoundly commit to continue serving as lector/commentator, catechist and will never cease singing songs of praise to God in the Eucharistic celebrations together with other selfless fellow workers in the vineyard of the Lord, “*We shall be shining lamps giving light to all around us*” (Ven. Catherine McAuley).

We face hurdles and overcome whatever crosses us in taking the path of “Mercy” which our loving God calls us to tread with everyone in our care. This time of “pause”, is an invitation from God to look at our lives, to see and believe that what matters most is to trust fully in God’s divine providence. As a *Misericordian*, I continue to be the voice that echoes the Mercy of God to His people. I believe that everything has a purpose, and it works according to His plan.