

“WHY? Where is God?!!”

Zoom Sharing with SFCCAA0N (26th October 2021)

Good morning and good evening to everyone! I wish to thank Lucilla and her committee for thinking up this Zoom as a suitable way of meeting up with a good number of my dear Franciscans, and I also thank Joanna Shea who is helping us host our meeting today. I was happy to see that, in spite of the restrictions imposed upon us by the Covid 19, the Alumnae Association has continued to keep contact with the members spread out in the different regions of Ontario through a regular Newsletter.

I wish to thank all of you for participating in this Zoom encounter today. I am truly overwhelmed by the big turnout of so many of you, my dear girls. I understand that you are keen to hear what I have to share with you, but I wish to suggest something more important. More than listening attentively to me, I would like you all to go deeper, to listen beyond my words, and try to catch the message that the Lord Jesus may be giving to each of you today, for this moment of your life. Jesus has a very personal message for each one of you. So listen attentively to your heart and jot down any thought that may strike you while you listen. So get your paper and pen ready! Then later, you can reflect on those thoughts again and decide to do what He is asking of you personally. In this way, today's sharing will become fruitful for your life, and not remain just empty words for your ears!

I do hope that all of you and your family members have been keeping fit through the social distancing rules, the masks and the vaccinations, and above all, keeping closer to one another with mutual concern, interest and moral support. I believe that you have also grown in your awareness of the needs of your less fortunate neighbours and other people around you, like the elderly who are home-bound, or lonely, or in need of assistance of all kinds, maybe through a word of comfort or even just a friendly smile.

During these past 2 years of the pandemic, many people of faith, and even non-believers, have been asking: “Why is this happening? And where is God in all this? Does He not care about our suffering situation?” “If there is a God who is good and powerful, why does He not stop this scourge, instead of allowing so many people to suffer losses of all kinds and to die?” Maybe this has also been our thoughts at some time or other. “Why is God so silent? Is he asleep or just not caring about us?”

I don't know how many of you had the chance to follow on-line the extraordinary moment of prayer with Pope Francis on 27th March 2020, an event which united the whole world, in perfect silence, focusing upon St. Peter's Square in Rome. It was really a very touching experience to see the whole world turning to the Holy Father, for light and inspiration to

make sense of this global scourge that is still affecting all the nations of our world today. Where is God, now that we are all sinking in this fierce storm that is beyond our control to calm down? If He is almighty, why doesn't He do something to change all this? And we are always ready to teach God what He should do!

(Slide 1 – St. Peter's Square) On that day, it seemed as if the whole world, at least the whole Catholic world, had stopped for a long while and was invited to raise their minds and hearts to God our Creator and Father, in a silence that was deafening; a world that felt afraid and lost, helpless and powerless to control this situation. **(Slide 2)** That evening, the Pope was seen all alone in the empty square of St. Peter's, walking slowly and quietly, under the rain, in the dark, up the path leading to an altar near the entrance to the Basilica of St. Peter's. It was a very touching experience to witness this scene. After a long pause, standing in front of the Holy Bible, the Pope then began to read the Gospel of that day, St. Luke, Ch. 4: 35-41, **(Slide 3)**

I believe you may remember the short passage of the Gospel describing the occasion when a great storm broke out while the Apostles were crossing the lake in the dark evening. The winds were strong and the boat was sinking, but Jesus was fast asleep in the stern, with His head resting on a pillow. **(Slide 4)** The terrified Apostles cried out to Him: **"Lord, don't you care that we are drowning?"** Finally, Jesus got up, He rebuked the wind and said "Quiet! Be still!" At His word, the wind died down at once, and it was completely calm. Then Jesus said to his disciples, **"Why are you so afraid? Have you no faith?"**

It must have hurt Jesus to hear His disciples saying to Him: **Don't you care?** How would you feel if one day your teenaged children or young adults, were to say to you: **"Don't you care about me?"** when they feel that you have failed to understand some needs of theirs? I am sure that you would feel really hurt to hear them say this, for you alone know how many sacrifices you went through to give them life and to care for them when they were tiny, sick and with so many different needs. **(Close slide 4)**

Perhaps, we too may have asked Our Lord this question many times, when we felt so helpless and unable to solve some problems in our lives. And yet, the truth is that Jesus, more than anyone else, does care about us, even if sometimes He doesn't seem to answer our prayers. Actually, believe it or not, Jesus always answers our prayers, but in His own way and at His own time... always for our real good. Any delay of Jesus in giving us a sign of His concern, may be His way of calling us to a greater faith and trust in His love and in His care for us. It is never easy to understand the ways of God and of the attitude of Jesus that day in the storm. While the disciples were alarmed and desperate, Jesus slept on soundly, with His head on a pillow in the stern of the boat, trusting His Heavenly Father so completely. Of

course Jesus cared about the disciples that day, and even about us today. More than anything else, He cares about our eternal happiness, about our real good, not what we think to be good for us. The great proof of His love is that He humbled Himself, coming all the way down from Heaven, to share our human life, to suffer and die for us, in order to show us the way to go back to Heaven. In fact, Jesus is the Way that we need to follow in order to be saved. He Himself told us that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We just need to do as Jesus did, in our own little ways, with our own little steps. We cannot say that we don't know how; He came on purpose to show us how we should behave in order to become like Him.

Is this pandemic not showing us and teaching us just how meaningless is our desire for control and for power, for wealth and prestige; how foolish mankind is to think that we are all-intelligent, all-powerful and self-sufficient, and therefore that we do not need God? In fact, do we really believe that we need God after all? Yes, indeed we do! This time of disaster is calling us to remember that we are very limited, that we are dust, and to dust we shall return, every one of us, no one excepted. God is allowing us to experience just how powerless and helpless we are to save ourselves. Maybe this pandemic is really a blessing in disguise, when God is telling us to return to Him, just because He loves us and cares for our true and eternal happiness, and He alone has the power to save us. He is showing us that we are not self-sufficient and in control; He is telling us not to waste so much time on unimportant matters, but to live with a correct scale of values. It certainly **is a time when God is educating us** on what the essential values of our life are.

This experience of the pandemic is also **a time of choosing** today how we want to live the rest of these short years of our lives. When Jesus was teaching during His public life, He gave us what is called the "Great Commandment of Love". (Does anyone remember what this is?) Yes, it is: **Love God above all things; love your neighbour as I, Jesus, have loved you!** But, who is my neighbour? the Scribe had asked Jesus in the Gospel passage of the Good Samaritan. **(Slide 5)** Who is my neighbour? Is it just my friends, the people next door? What about the people of another nation that is at war with us, or the people who have hurt us in some way? Are they considered our neighbours or our enemies? Are there any exceptions of people that we don't need to love? The parable of Jesus clearly teaches us that the question we should ask is not "**Who** is my neighbour", but "**How can I** become a "neighbour" to any person who is in need?"

During this pandemic, are we becoming more aware of this teaching of Jesus? Are we beginning to recognize better the poor among us that need our care and attention? What can we do to become a true "neighbour" to those who are in need? What can we do to

become better persons, to get closer to God, and to trust more in Him? Remember that it is only Jesus the one who can calm the many storms in the sea of our lives.

(Slide 6) Jesus invites us to wake up and to put into practice the **7 Spiritual and 7 Corporal Works of Mercy**, to practise charity and solidarity with those in need, not just with financial help, but maybe sometimes with just a simple, but sincere smile, a kind and comforting word to one who is afraid, sad, lonely; or a visit to a sick person, a glass of water to one who is thirsty, or teaching the right path to one who has gone astray, etc., etc...so many other little ways that are within our power to notice and to show ourselves a real 'neighbour'. We are asked to help ourselves and others to overcome the evil of death, loneliness, sadness and fear with little acts of charity, a love that is shown in little ways. Do you still remember the song we used to sing in School: **"Whatsoever you do to the least of your brothers, that you do unto me!"** Let us sing this together: **(Slide 7 Song with words)**

(Slide 8) Let us go to Jesus on the cross where we can find the courage to embrace all the hardships of our life, and also to support others who are suffering. Let us not waste any more time to create more space in our hearts and in our lives for God and for His love, and to go to Him with greater faith, hope and trust. It is here that we will find our strength and courage to persevere in the storms of life. There is a story that tells of one little child who was once asked, while travelling in a ship during a heavy storm: "Little one, aren't you afraid that we are going to drown?" "Oh, no!" the child answered with serenity and total confidence, "My Father is the Captain of this ship! We will not drown!" Yes, Jesus is the captain of our ship. We will not drown, but we will be tested in this life; and at the end of our lives, with the final examination of this Great Commandment of Love. How have we loved and served our neighbour in need?

So, when the unbelieving world challenges us with the question: **"Where is your God? Doesn't he care about us all? Aren't you afraid that we are drowning in this pandemic?"**... Let this be our answer too, **"No, I am not afraid, because My Father is the Captain of this ship!"** He may not necessarily remove the obstacle or the problem, but He will certainly be there with us, cheering us ahead, and supporting us with His grace!

Slide 9 (Animation) What can we learn from all this for today and tomorrow? The Holy Father reminds us that this Pandemic is (i) a **Time for gratitude** to doctors, nurses and all the people who are working with great sacrifice to give to the society the essential services that are needed. It is certainly not a time to be indifferent and self-centred, but (ii) **a time to give and to open our hearts** to show care, to give hope and encouragement to others. (iii) **It is a time**, not for division, but **for solidarity**, to be united in our efforts **to support one another, and to be reconciled** among individuals and among nations. (iv) **It is a time**, not

for forgetfulness, but **for greater awareness** to do the little we can to contribute to the poor, all those in need, regardless of colour, race or religion, but with open hearts of compassion to help and to comfort.

(v) **It is a time to remember and to believe more strongly in Christ's presence** among us, doing something positive and new in our lives each moment, which perhaps we cannot see immediately now. He wants us to realize that it is (vi) **a time to change our extravagant life-style** for a more simple, more austere one, more friendly to the environment, to our Mother Nature; to be less wasteful of our resources and to share these with others in a more fair and just way. And above all, (vii) **it is the time to treat every person as a child of God**, to be respected as an equal, never discarding anyone as a burden or a parasite, and never to be looked down upon because of different colour, creed or ideology; but to discover in each person a brother or sister, made to the image and likeness of God, our Creator and Father. . **(Close slide 9)**

So, my dear girls, let us now pause a moment and join with the Holy Father in the unique and special experience of that night. Let us recite this prayer together with all the people of good will and with the whole of humanity: **(Slide 10)**

Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again, "Do not be afraid". And we, together with St. Peter, "Will cast all our anxieties onto you, for we firmly believe that you care about us". Amen.