



FRATERNAL MESSAGE

**addressed to the clergy of the Archdiocese of Caceres
in celebration of the Holy Week 2020**

*“The waves of death rose about me.
The pains of the netherworld surrounded me.
In my anguish I called to the Lord,
and from his holy temple He heard my voice.”*
(Psalm 18:5-6)

My Brother Priests,

Psalm 18 can easily be the prayer of our community in these trying times. As we count the days before the beginning of Holy Week, and with the lingering Covid-19 epidemic, we continue to experience uncertainty and anxiety. Many of our faithful are paralyzed by fear. They are fearful of what the coming days will bring about. Our parishioners, especially the poor and the vulnerable, are hemmed in by fear of the virus, by hunger, illness, loss of jobs, death and sorrow. We cannot seem to stem the destructive tide of this epidemic. Added to this mayhem is the continuing confusion and arrogance of some of our leaders. Likewise, the hard headedness of some of our people is appalling. No wonder the transmission of the virus remains unhampered. With these situations we are gradually eaten up by frustration, anger and despair.

And so, we cannot help but ask: Are we that helpless? Are we that isolated? Shall we raise up our hands in surrender to the unseen enemy? Do we unashamedly mute our collective voices in defeat? Do we allow our hearts to grow faint unable to muster strength and courage? Has no one come to our side and save us? My brothers return to Psalm 18 above and read: “In my anguish I called to the Lord, and from his holy temple He heard my voice.”

My brothers, the coming memorial of the Paschal mystery (Passion, Death and Resurrection), is the remembrance of the darkness that once covered human history. But that darkness was only temporary. After three days of heavy darkness, LIGHT had been restored. LIFE had been reborn. The Risen Christ had dispelled the darkness as He did during his birth. And having offered Himself on the cross for sinful humankind, the Risen Christ had gifted us with New Life. And so, at Holy Mass we say: “We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.”

My brother priests, our prescribed manner of celebrating the Holy Week, especially the Holy Triduum in these trying times, is something we did not foresee nor imagine. Holy Week celebration with no congregation? No sacred processions? No Visita Iglesia? No pabasa? No Easter angels? Huh? Unheard of in the entire history of our local Church. But that is the stark reality we are in and we have to accept it with humility and obedience. It reminds us of the experience of Israel in exile:

“By the rivers of Babylon
we sat mourning and weeping
when we remembered Zion.
On the poplars of that land
we hung up our harps.
There our captors asked us...
“Sing for us a song of Zion.”
But how could we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land?
If I forget you, Jerusalem
may my right hand wither.
May my tongue stick to my palate

if I do not remember you,
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
beyond all my delights.” (Ps 137,1-6)

Let us not forget the New Jerusalem, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Given the limitations in our Holy Week liturgical celebrations, still we make up for what we lack in the rites, celebrating with hearts full of faith, praise, and thanksgiving to Jesus our Savior who died for us. Conduct our celebrations privately or through the social media with solemnity and reverence. We do well to reflect on the words of Jesus assuring us: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in your midst.” (*Mt. 18,20*) Be deeply convinced my brothers that Jesus is truly present in our hearts, in our celebrations and in our parishes.

The tenor of the Paschal Mystery is always Faith, Hope, Love and Joy! “For God so loved the world, He gave us his only Son, Jesus Christ, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. (*John 3,16*) This is the Joy of the Paschal Mystery, the *Evangelii Gaudium!*

As servants of hope, we serve our faithful by lifting up their drooping spirit weighed down by countless problems and difficulties. As good shepherds we lead them beyond these difficulties and foster Christian community spirit. Let our Faith in Jesus be the driving force to our ‘Bayanihan’ culture of helping one another.

‘*Caritas Christi urget nos!*’ The love of Jesus Christ be our inspiration to do works of mercy towards our poor brothers and sisters. This is not the time to selfish security but an occasion to utmost generosity. Our parishes should be an oasis to those who thirst, and home of comfort to those who carry heavy loads. Our Social Action Center and Chancery are tasked to assist our parishes. Let us be ready to welcome with warm hospitality our health front liners who may need a place to rest.

In sincere expression of gratitude to our brave doctors, nurses, health workers, LGU officials, health agencies, our soldiers, police, media people, and service workers, we lift them up to the Lord during these days of penance, prayer and celebration. May God protect them from all harm and sustain their spirit of service.

We remember and pray for those who have died due to Covid-19. Even at the distance we pray for the dying. As servants of compassion, we provide spiritual consolation to grieving families. We give thanks and pray for those who have recovered.

My brother priests, in your Holy Week celebrations, be assured of my presence in your parishes in fraternal spirit and deep prayer.

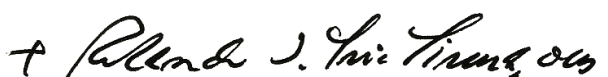
God bless you all, and carry in your hearts my fraternal affection as you go about diligently in your various ministries.

Together we look forward to Easter Sunday where we proclaim: “*Resurrexit sicut dixit!*”
Alleluia!”

O Divino Rostro, be our shield against Covid-19.
Our Lady of Penafrancia, protect us with your maternal mantle
St. Joseph, guardian of the Holy Family, pray for us.
St. Raphael, the Archangel, pray for us.

AMEN!

Christi Sumus,


✠ ROLANDO J. TRIA TIRONA, OCD, DD
Archbishop of Caceres
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Pilgrim City of Naga, Philippines