



# Solidarity and the Coronavirus Crisis

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*A Message to the Institutions of the European Union*

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This year, the great proclamation of Easter rang out in empty churches. The celebration of the inseparable closeness of God to humankind, achieved once and for all in Jesus Christ, was broadcast to a people unable to gather as a body, still less to enjoy the human warmth of an embrace, all because a virus had rendered physical proximity potentially fatal. Nonetheless, the power of God's closeness to us emboldens us to hold to a spirit of closeness between all human beings. Indeed, as Christians, we cling to it as our deepest conviction.

The unsettling experience of the coronavirus pandemic has strengthened the awareness of all the peoples of Europe of a bond of interconnectedness that links us all. We are none of us isolated individuals. We are so closely linked to one another at every level that, without even knowing it, we have the power to do both immense good and immense harm to one another.

In this awareness of our inescapable interconnectedness the Church sees the dawning of a precious gift: "solidarity". Awareness gives birth to change, what we call "conversion", both for human persons and political bodies, bearing fruit in relationships marked by genuine ethical and social solidarity.

For individuals, this growing awareness must issue in a firm resolve to dedicate one's life and energy to serving the common good. Helping people grow in the moral virtue of solidarity is part of the vocation of the Church. In many of our countries, that resolve has been clearly visible during this crisis in the tireless and brave commitment of healthcare workers, public servants and political leaders.

For political bodies, conversion means transforming the structures of sin that damage relationships between individuals and peoples into structures of solidarity, through legislation, regulation, and legal systems. Europe is the fruit of just such institutional conversion and in itself embodies solidarity. As Pope Francis said on Easter Sunday, the post-war project of solidarity which enabled Europe to rise again, overcame the conflicts of the past. It is imperative, he added, "that these rivalries do not regain force, but that all recognize themselves as part of a single family and support one another."

During these weeks:

- we have learned that **we cannot live healthily on a sick planet**. We appeal to you to rethink the present model of globalisation so that it embodies effective solidarity with the poor, the natural environment and future generations. The teaching of Pope Francis offers an integral vision of the multifaceted solidarity we need. The aftermath of the pandemic must not see a dilution of Europe's commitment in this direction but a stepping up of its efforts.

- we have witnessed **how difficult pan-European solidarity is** in practice, particularly nowadays. At the beginning of the crisis, there was a lack of solidarity with Italy and Spain; the initial reflex was "every country for itself". But we know we are all in the same situation: we will sink or swim together. Thankfully, the Union has found its way back to practical solidarity – for now. In the medium term, the challenge will be to address the economic and social fallout of the pandemic. Inevitably this will entail some redistribution of wealth from richer to poorer countries. We appeal to you, 75 years after the end of the Second World War and 70 years after the Schuman Declaration, to ensure that the EU overcomes the existential threat posed by the current lack of appetite for international solidarity.
- we have been and remain fearful about **the progress of the virus in the global south** and the havoc it might yet wreak in countries which lack resources to protect themselves. European solidarity prefigures global solidarity. We appeal now for the cancellation of the debt of poorer countries, more humanitarian aid and development cooperation, with military spending redirected towards health and social services.
- we have seen **the destitution of refugees and asylum seekers**, including those confined to camps across our continent. European solidarity must also extend urgently to them. As Cardinal Michael Czerny put it recently, "they have arrived in Europe physically but not humanly". Europe must not let them down.

As Pope Francis says, "the European Union is currently facing an epochal challenge, on which will depend not only its future but that of the whole world." This crisis is a spiritual opportunity for conversion. We cannot, either as individuals or as polities, hope to return to the "old normal". We must seize the moment to work for radical change inspired by our deepest convictions. We, the undersigned Major Superiors of the Society of Jesus in Europe and the Near East, wish those working in the European institutions well as you labour for the recovery of Europe and the whole world from this pandemic. May God grant you success in building a new Europe of genuine warmth and solidarity.

**The Jesuit Conference of European Provincials**  
*Brussels, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020*

Fr. Franck Janin, SJ (President of the Jesuit Conference of European Provincials)  
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*The Jesuit Conference of European Provincials is made up of 20 units called "Provinces" or "Regions" which extend over the countries of the European Union but more widely over the whole European continent and also the Near East. This represents about 4000 Jesuits and hundreds of different institutions.*