

To the Cloistered Nuns
A letter from the Desert

We turn to you, sisters living behind walls, to ask for your prayers. We ask during this time of special danger and struggle which our communities are experiencing, that you keep your arms raised like those who did so for Moses on the mountain. Our resilience depends on your insistent intercession, as does our future victory. You are the only Italians not to flinch in the face of the downpour of decrees and restrictions which have drenched us in recent days. This is because what we have been asked to do for a time is what you have always done, and that which we put up with, you have already chosen.

Teach us the art of being content with nothing, of living in a confined space, without going out but yet with the art of being charged with the need for that inner journey which requires neither fresh air nor trains. "Give us some of your oil" so we can learn that the spirit cannot be imprisoned and that the smaller the space, the greater is the opening onto the heavens.

Teach us that it is possible to live with very little and to live in joy. Remind us that poverty is the unavoidable condition of every being because, as Primo Mazzolari has said, "to be poor, we only have to be human." Teach us again about the savour of little things, you who smile at a lily flowering outside the window and who salute the swallows when they come to tell us that spring has arrived, you who are moved by sorrow and yet can still delight in the miracle of bread rising in the oven. Give us back that delight in the small things.

Tell us that it is possible to be close without being together in the one place, that we can communicate from afar, kiss without touching, enrich each other with the caress of a glance or a smile, quite simply, just to look at each other. Remind us that the word is important if it has matured for a long time in the heart, if it has been lightened in the storeroom of the heart, if we see it flower on the lips of another when it is spoken quietly, without shouting or being sharpened to wound. Above all, teach us the art of silence, of the light which touches the windowsill, of the sun who rises 'like a bridegroom coming from his chamber', or the art of the sunset in a heaven tinged with fire, of the evening quiet, of the lit candle which throws a shadow across the walls of the choir.

Tell us again that it is possible to wait for an embrace, even to wait a lifetime, because 'there is a time for embracing and a time a time refrain from embracing' as Quohelth says. President Conte has said that when this time of danger and restriction is over, we will once again embrace with celebration. For you, Sisters, there have already been twenty, thirty, forty years of waiting...

Teach us to do things slowly with solemnity and without rushing, to pay attention to details because every day is a miracle, every encounter is a gift, every step an entrance into the throne room, like the step in a dance or the movement of a symphony

Whisper to us that it is important to wait, to send a kiss, a gift, a caress, a word, because waiting for the feast strengthens the light because 'the best is yet to be'. Help us to understand that an accident can be a grace, and a disappointment can hide a gift, that a parting can deepen the love and that distance can lead to being together finally.

To you, mistresses of the hidden and happy life, we entrust our discomfort, our fear, our remorse, our missed appointments with God who always waits for us. Take all this into your prayer and restore us to joy, to the fragrance of flowers and to days of peace. Amen.

+ Arturo Aiello
Avellino, 13 March 2020