

Let us go forth and seek those who are estranged

Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Life is a priceless gift that God gives us: life in itself is always good and beautiful. However, we must admit that human life is under the attack of a highly destructive culture of death. According to World Health Organisation statistics, on average there is some person who dies of suicide every 40 seconds in the world.¹ The suicide fatality rate exceeds the combined figures of deaths caused by war and homicide, and the number of unsuccessful suicide attempts is many times more than suicide deaths. As the World Suicide Prevention Day (10th September) approaches, I appeal to all the faithful to join me in showing concern for the problem of suicide.

Persons who attempt suicide face desperate situations in their personal lives. These situations are brought on by many factors: whether it be the unbearable pain and fear caused by bodily or mental illnesses, the difficult livelihood of the poor caused by unequal distribution of resources, the sense of helplessness dealing with the problems of social injustice, as well as the pain caused by all sorts of crimes and sins, an inability to cope with sudden accidents, etc. Those who attempt suicide are treading on an seemingly inevitable path of painful experience in their lives. In face of the doubts in life, we shall do well to keep in mind the words of Scripture: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me” (Psalm 23).

The Church respects and seeks to protect life at every stage. We do not only care for suicide attempters, but for those who die of suicide and their families as well. The problem of suicide entails many issues the Church has long been concerned with, such as poverty, sickness, discrimination, marginalisation, and other social problems. Twenty five years ago, St. John Paul II promulgated the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, wherein he highlighted the inviolable value of human life and called us to be the “People of Life”, to take part in the mission of protecting and promoting life together. The culture of death is not something to be easily dismissed when it grows under the prevalent trends of secularism, individualism, utilitarianism, and hedonism. We must be united in spirit and combat the culture of death with the “culture of love”.

¹ World Health Organisation 2019 World Suicide Prevention Day Press Release.

As Jesus's disciples, we are called to be the "neighbour" of each person,² so I invite each of you and also the communities of faithful to perform acts of charity in response to the recent appeal by the Congregation for the Clergy to "go forth and seek those who are estranged".³ There are various ways which we may use to offer others the gospel of life:

1. Care for your family, friends, and colleagues; make time to listen to the things they wish to share about in their lives;
2. Actively make contact with relatives and friends, including those living abroad, especially those who live alone, the sick, children and youth in need of care, and acquaintances who find themselves in areas suffering from the pandemic outbreak;
3. Participate in parish associations and teams that organise visits to the underprivileged, the lonely, prisoners, and people in straits;
4. Care for the people whom you see on a daily basis.

At the same time, I wish to encourage those who are in difficulties to have the courage and sense of gratitude to truly welcome the care and solicitude offered by others. This helps to relieve one from loneliness and helplessness. Charity also does its best when there is this openness of heart.

Our solicitude can allow those receiving it to realise that people remember them and care for them. For people in trouble, a simple smile may already deliver much consolation and encouragement. Love requires courage, and it requires a sense of commitment as well. When we feel falling short of the call of duty, please remember the encouraging words of Pope Francis: "Take courage! I only ask that you make your heart beat, nothing more, and to look intently. The rest will naturally follow."⁴

Here we beseech Holy Mary, Mother of the Church, Comfort of the Afflicted, for her guidance and protection, to comfort the afflicted, confirm the doubtful, grant peace and health of soul and body to people who are in desperate situations!

² Encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, Chapter IV "You did it to me".

³ Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church", of the Congregation for the Clergy.

⁴ Video message from Pope Francis to the participants of the spirituality course in the Argentinian Diocese of Comodoro de Rivadavia, 24th July 2020.

