

The 2020 Fr. Lydio F. Tomasi, C.S. Lecture

Mobility and Lockdown: Challenges to the Human

Delivered by His Eminence Cardinal Michael F. Czerny, S.J. at the
2020 Catholic Immigrant Integration Initiative (CIII) Conference

I thank Notre Dame's president, Father John Jenkins C.S.C., for inviting me to deliver the Fr. Lydio F. Tomasi, C.S. Annual Lecture on International Migration and to keynote this year's Catholic Immigration Integration Initiative Conference. When on the 9th of January he invited me, I accepted immediately.

And then, suddenly, the whole world was engulfed by COVID-19. At the Migrants and Refugees Section, we had to change how we worked while carrying on preparations for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which took place a week ago.

So when I finally began to think about this address, the raging pandemic and human mobility were shedding puzzling and troubling light on each other. That's why the title is a paradox: "Mobility *and* Lockdown," not "versus." In this globally paradoxical situation, the Holy Father warns "Don't try to go back" but points out important ways of going forward. What he proposes is clearly Christian, definitely tough, and essential for getting on with our research, work and ministry on behalf of vulnerable people on the move.

I. Paradoxes of Displacement

To set the stage, I want to highlight how the pandemic alters the picture of migration. Before winter 2020, I would have told you that 'migrants' can encompass people looking for a better life; refugees fleeing war, societal breakdown, or climate change; internally displaced peoples who feel like aliens in their own country; and perhaps most shamefully of all, victims of human trafficking. To these most vulnerable, displaced people on the move, God is especially close.

But now, *displacement* is true for the great majority of people the world over. Of course, they may not be on the move; indeed, many are told to stay at home! This displaces them from their normal routines. And because all the world's economies are seriously disrupted, even those who enjoy their current living arrangements face changes in what they can buy or sell or do. Stable, comfortable lives and prosperous populations are uprooted: taking goods and services for granted, they're surprised to see them interrupted, or scarce, or the human cost involved; accustomed to

moving at will, rapidly and conveniently, they're suddenly stuck; accustomed to consuming a great deal, they're forced to reduce, or even motivated to simplify.

And what about those who were on the move – the migrant workers, the refugees, and so on? When things are normal, these people, even in the best of times, do not experience what 'normal' normally means. *Normal* for many such people is nowhere close to what would be generally acceptable conditions of life. Instead, they endure months and typically years of uncertainty, acute anxiety, precarious nutrition and lodging, poor health, legal limbo, and either unemployment or the risk of exploitation and abuse if they do find something to do.

Then COVID comes along. The precarious work disappears. They can't go back to their former country because borders are closed. They have to stay, but now with even less means to survive on. As governments scurry to improvise solutions and protect their own citizens, the forgotten ones become doubly – and even more deliberately – forgotten. Think of those crowded in camps and other detention facilities, where COVID can spread like wildfire. Think of those living on the streets, unable to take the most basic health precautions. Think of those who lack the means to "distance socially" in a safe manner, such as those in slums. And think of those forced to go to work each day, lacking the luxury of home offices and zoom calls – those who work in the informal economy, the often invisible people who provide essential services, putting food on our tables and doing the lowest-paid health care jobs.

Next, think about how lockdown changes 'us and them.' Prior to the pandemic, we would hear the word *lock* in association with persons and groups who were not really like us. *They*, not *we*, need to be locked up or locked away. The *them* could be fellow-citizens who are locked away in remote camps during wartime because *we* decide it's safer to mistrust all of *them* due to their ethnic background. The *them* could be the individuals whom we lock up in prison for all sorts of good and bad reasons. But now lockdown is imposed on everybody. Why? Because with the hazard of disease spreading uncontrollably, everybody has to have their movements severely restricted. And that's not just for the benefit of some; it's for the *common good*. Suddenly we discover that there's just *one* category, everyone belongs to "we" and "us," and the difficult restrictions are for everyone's good, the common good. Isn't this like the discovery that climate is a worldwide phenomenon that affects everyone, as Pope Francis said five years ago, and all of us must care for our *common home*?

II. Pope Francis's teachings on the pandemic

Let me now talk about what the Holy Father teaches us about the pandemic. He reminds us that, during times of great anxiety and suffering, we need to amend the threefold relationships that define human life – with God, with our neighbor, and with all of creation. Like every serious injustice, sickness, or suffering, COVID-19 is a wake-up call to amend our lives, our attitudes, and our social interactions. In the

words of *Laudato Si'*, it is an invitation to be more attentive to the double cry of the earth and of the poor.

The Holy Father has given us a rich collection of teachings over the past half-year under COVID, reflecting on the injustices that it exposes and what we need to do for a post-COVID world. Let me suggest that the Holy Father dwells on the following seven key themes:

- we must put the common good above self-centeredness;
- we must reject indifference, invisibility, and individualism;
- don't ignore and don't forget;
- don't foster divisions;
- don't be hypocrites;
- we can't rely on an economic model based on greed, zeal for profit, and instant gratification;
- we can't rely on technocratic solutions.

Let me touch briefly on what he has to say about each of these themes.

1) Regarding *the need to put the common good above short-sighted self-interest*, Pope Francis declares that we are all in one boat. We can all get sick, rich and poor alike. We are all anxious. We are all vulnerable. "We find ourselves afraid and lost," he says. "Like the disciples in the Gospel, we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us."¹

Further, he stresses: "This is not a time for self-centredness, because the challenge we are facing is shared by all, without distinguishing between persons."² Same boat but different decks.

2) We must combat *indifference, invisibility, and individualism*.

While COVID is a disaster, Pope Francis warns: "The risk is that we may then be struck by an even worse virus, that of *selfish indifference*. A virus spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine if it is fine for me. It begins there and ends up selecting one person over another, discarding the poor, and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress."³ For with indifference, "things that do not affect me, do not interest me."⁴

Besides being a disease to be fought, the coronavirus has shed light on broader social ills. Francis draws out this theme: "At times we look at others as objects, to be used

¹ "Why Are You Afraid?" *Urbi et Orbi Address during the Extraordinary Moment of Prayer*, Sagrato of St Peter's Basilica, 27 March 2020.

² "Like a New Flame," *Urbi et Orbi Address – Easter 2020*, Saint Peter's Basilica, 12 April 2020.

³ "Egoism: an Even Worse Virus," Extract from the *Homily, II Sunday of Easter (or Feast of Divine Mercy)*, Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, 19 April 2020.

⁴ General Audience, 12 August 2020.

and discarded. In reality, this type of perspective blinds and fosters an individualistic and aggressive throw-away culture, which transforms the human being into a consumer good.”⁵ It renders our fellow humans *invisible* as people.

The Holy Father connects these attitudes: “Indifferent: I look the other way. Individualist: looking out only for one’s own interest.”⁶ “This is not a time for indifference,” he emphasizes over and over again, “because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic.”

3) The Pope warns against *forgetfulness* regarding present reality as well as the past. About the present, he says clearly: “The crisis we are facing should not make us forget the many other crises that bring suffering to so many people.”⁷ And for us gathered here, this includes the crisis of refugees forced across borders and oceans, of people displaced internally, of the scourge of human trafficking.

The second dimension relates to time and memory. “Let us not lose our memory once all this is past,” says Pope Francis, “let us not file it away and go back to where we were.”⁸ Remember that where we were was not good enough. Let us strive for something better that enhances the common good and reduces invisibility, indifference, individualism, and the throwaway culture.

4) The fourth point is to *avoid division* – especially division that results in violence and bloodshed. “This is not a time for division,” the Holy Father says. Rather, “may Christ our peace enlighten all who have responsibility in conflicts, that they may have the courage to support the appeal for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. This is not a time for continuing to manufacture and deal in arms, spending vast amounts of money that ought to be used to care for others and save lives.”⁹

5) The fifth and related point is to *avoid hypocrisy*. “This crisis is affecting us all, rich and poor alike,” he says “and putting a spotlight on hypocrisy.” He goes on: “I am worried by the hypocrisy of certain political personalities who speak of facing up to the crisis, of the problem of hunger in the world, but who in the meantime manufacture weapons. This is a time to be converted from this kind of functional hypocrisy. It’s a time for integrity. Either we are coherent with our beliefs or we lose everything.”¹⁰

6) Let us vigorously question *an economic model based on greed, zeal for profit, and instant gratification*. These fault-lines were exposed by COVID. Pope Francis notes that: “Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste... we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we

⁵ General Audience, 12 August 2020.

⁶ General Audience, 12 August 2020.

⁷ “Like a New Flame,” *Urbi et Orbi Address – Easter 2020*, Saint Peter’s Basilica, 12 April 2020.

⁸ Interview with Austen Ivereigh, *Commonweal*, 8 April 2020.

⁹ “Like a New Flame,” *Urbi et Orbi Address – Easter 2020*, Saint Peter’s Basilica, 12 April 2020.

¹⁰ Interview with Austen Ivereigh, *Commonweal*, 8 April 2020.

listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick.”¹¹ This is no longer tenable; we need a new paradigm. Rather, the Holy Father expresses his hope that “this time of danger will free us from operating on automatic pilot, shake our sleepy consciences and allow a humanist and ecological conversion that puts an end to the idolatry of money and places human life and dignity at the center. Our civilization – so competitive, so individualistic, with its frenetic rhythms of production and consumption, its extravagant luxuries, its disproportionate profits for just a few – needs to downshift, take stock, and renew itself.”¹²

7) The seventh and final point – *we cannot rely on a technocratic paradigm*. Yes, we need science-based solutions to the pandemic, well-designed vaccines and therapies – and these remedies cannot become the preserve of the rich but must be available to the poor at low or even zero cost.¹³ But more fundamentally, the cold anonymity of technocracy will not save us. We must put people first. Pope Francis expresses his hope that “governments understand that technocratic paradigms (whether state-centered or market-driven) are not enough to address this crisis or the other great problems affecting humankind. Now more than ever, persons, communities, and peoples must be put at the center, united to heal, to care, and to share.”¹⁴

Let me sum up the deeper paradox. The pandemic appeared in a particular context – one of widespread injustice, inequality, and assaults on our common home. And this context both aggravates the pandemic and impels us to try and make things better. We need to find a cure both for this “small but terrible virus,” and for the “larger virus” of social injustice, inequality of opportunity, marginalization, and the lack of protection for the weakest.¹⁵ The prescription offered by Pope Francis unleashes the “antibodies of justice, charity, and solidarity.”¹⁶ How might we develop those antibodies?

Pope Francis spent two months discussing the antidotes, the building blocks of a post-COVID world. In the nine Wednesday General Audiences of August and September, the Holy Father applied the principles of Catholic social teaching – human dignity, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, the universal destination of goods, the preferential option for the poor, and care for our common home – to the current pandemic-induced challenges. This is the work of every Annual Catholic Immigrant Integration Initiative, this is the basic theme of every Fr. Lydio F. Tomasi, C.S. Annual Lecture

¹¹ “Why Are You Afraid?” *Urbi et Orbi Address during the Extraordinary Moment of Prayer*, Sagrato of St Peter’s Basilica, 27 March 2020.

¹² “To an Invisible Army,” *Letter to Popular Movements*, 12 April 2020.

¹³ General Audience, 19 August 2020.

¹⁴ “To an Invisible Army,” *Letter to Popular Movements*, 12 April 2020.

¹⁵ General Audience, 19 August 2020.

¹⁶ “A Plan to Rise Up Again,” The original text written in Spanish was published by « Vida Nueva » on 17 April 2020. This English translation has been carried out by LEV staff.

Conclusion

I began with something of a paradox: refugees and involuntary migrants are forced to move, to escape, to flee, by war, by injustice, by climate change – and yet now they are also forced to stay put, locked down by the COVID pandemic. It is in this paradox between mobile vulnerability and vulnerable lockdown, that we reflect on the plight of God’s people forced to flee. For we might be in the same boat, but we do not suffer equally.

“The pandemic has put us all in crisis,” Pope Francis keeps stressing. “But let us remember that after a crisis a person is not the same. We come out of it better, or we come out of it worse. This is our option.”¹⁷ We need a vaccine, but we also need antibodies of solidarity.

Let me conclude with a moment on action and conversion. The Holy Father urges us all to exit our self-centered preoccupations and notice and deal with the pain of others. Not with impersonal charity from on high, but getting our hands and feet dirty, our eyes, ears, and hearts dirty – on the periphery where the vulnerable have been shoved, on the front lines, in the Pope’s field hospitals. “To ‘see’ the poor means to restore their humanity,” says the Holy Father. “They are not things, not garbage; they are people. We can’t settle for a welfare policy such as we have for rescued animals.” And he pushes us deeper: “Go down into the underground, and pass from the hyper-virtual, fleshless world to the suffering flesh of the poor. This is the conversion we have to undergo. And if we don’t start there, there will be no conversion.”¹⁸ The new normal to which we are called is “that of the Kingdom of God, where ‘the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.’”¹⁹

¹⁷ General Audience, 19 August 2020.

¹⁸ Interview with Austen Ivereigh, *Commonweal*, 8 April 2020.

¹⁹ General Audience, 30 September 2020, quoting Mt 11:5.