



Looking to Mary “to see again the stars”

By Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFM Cap.

“And we issued out, from there, to see, again, the stars”. This last verse from Dante’s *Inferno* in the *Divine Comedy* came to mind when the final results of the four tests were given to me, tests that I and my confreres had to undergo. It was not just an “issuing out” in a physical sense and returning to a world of larger spaces instead of the confines of the four walls of our cells. It was in a metaphorical sense, an “issuing out” from the hell of sickness, from a hidden, malicious and unforgiving virus that strikes those who are the weakest, just as those evil spirits from the dark underworld do.

Those 30 long days of “confinement,” however, were also paradoxically, an opportunity to discover again a forgotten and unfamiliar freedom. The freedom from our jobs and duties became an opportunity to live the experience of the “Desert.” A time to look within ourselves without the clamour of distractions to interfere in the process of examination and discernment of our lives and response to our Lord’s calling. A time of more intense prayer to acknowledge our personal and ongoing journey of conversion, but also to bear the mental burden of this new situation. But this month of isolation was much more a state of anxiety than any spatial confinement. We

all worried about those who showed more serious symptoms, we worried that we could be infected or infect some of our older friars. It was very sad to see Brother Osvaldo become steadily weaker from the virus and to die alone without a friend or relation at his side to accompany him into the next life. We worried when Brother Aldo was admitted to the covid intensive care unit of “The Home for the Relief of Suffering” hospital, and kept alive thanks only to the use of a ventilator. We worried also for all those who were well and waiting for the results of their tests and that came back negative. We worried also for all those who work for us, all those who see to our food and other requirements and because of that risked infection. We worried how all these difficulties brought on by our quarantine and reduced activities in the shrine could end in ruin.

But more than anything, we all felt limited in our capacity to give to the faithful who live here and those few pilgrims visiting in the winter season, that full attention required by our ministry, even if we were able, during this crisis, to discover again the by now well-known and fundamental role of our TV and Social Media network to remain in continuous live connection with the people of God, in particular those devotees of Saint Pio who never ceased to manifest

their affection, closeness and gratitude. The efficacy of these media became very evident during this crisis and continued providing viewers with information on the spiritual life, transmitting the liturgical celebrations as well as many other programmes on *Padre Pio TV*, and many articles from our web pages and our magazine “The Voice of Padre Pio.”

On 8 December, the day in which the Church looks to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, our Mother, the Lord permitted us once more, after thirty days of waiting, full of hope and faith, and resigned to His will, that we return to serve Him in full. We must begin the New year looking to Our Lady. By looking to her we learn our future as redeemed Christians. She reveals to us what we will be. Reflecting on her life and ours in hers, let us make fruitful what time remains to us and make it an opportunity to reawaken our love for God and for our neighbour that we so often suppress with our selfishness and never-ending quest of ephemeral pleasure. Let us entrust to her our good intentions, so that she may place them at the feet of her all powerful Son, so that all of mankind may soon “see again the stars.”

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