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*The virtue of the soul that is called patience is such a great gift from God that He Himself, who bestows it on us, highlights His own patience when He awaits the wicked until they are corrected. Authentic human patience, worthy of being praised and called virtue, is shown in good spirits, with which we tolerate evils, so as not to place in a bad mood the goods that will allow us to achieve better things (Saint Augustine, On Patience 1,1-2)*

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## **GUIDELINES**

### **FROM THE AUGUSTINIAN SPIRITUALITY INSTITUTE**

Dear brothers and sisters:

Pope Francis urged us not to waste away the difficult days we are living but to pay attention to everyday details, since in small things we find our treasure (cf. Interview in *La Repubblica*, March 18, 2020). Along the same lines, the Prior General asked us to be vigilant "so that the physical isolation or other measures that are to be taken do not suppose an isolation of the soul" (Letter of March 14, 2020)

The members of the Executive Committee of the Augustinian Spirituality Institute want to help our brothers and sisters of the Order in these times of crisis. Sharing a message of hope, we offer some suggestions.

1. The questions that each of us must ask ourselves is: "How can I, and must I, live my consecration in these times of the coronavirus?" and "How can I exercise my ministry?". The circumstances change but not our duty. This is not a time for relaxation, absence, or confusion, but for coherence, creativity and authenticity.

2. There are many Augustinian communities and parishes that are sharing the Eucharist, talks and reflections via *streaming* through social networks. We congratulate our brothers and sisters for this ministry and thank them for their availability. We encourage everyone to continue advancing in this creativity and to value the importance of the media (always keeping in mind

a pastoral sense and avoiding self-referentiality). Perhaps some form of interaction can be thought of that avoids a merely passive attitude on the part of the receiver.

3. In this time of isolation and solitude, it is also necessary to offer the faithful the possibility of dialogue or of counsel. One idea is to offer concrete and simple possibilities so that someone can contact us by phone or other means. We believe that this apostolate, which is having great success in many places, can be strengthened. This ministry may offer availability and construct channels to break loneliness, help spiritually, advise, counsel, and accompany.

4. Social needs are growing and ecclesial charitable organizations, sometimes overwhelmed, depend on collaboration (donation of materials, food, etc.). Several communities, especially contemplative sisters, are contributing a lot in this regard. Perhaps the first step is to ask diocesan organisms or other ecclesial groups, how and in what concrete way one can help, while keeping strict respect for the norms of prevention. The second step is to ask ourselves how we can use our structures to serve the common good.

5. We are experiencing an unforeseen situation that continues over time. It is necessary that we know how to manage the required quarantine and confinement from a psychological point of view. Various specialized institutions provide guidelines for this and we encourage you to get to know them through the internet. As an example we offer here the guide prepared by the Religious and Priestly Life Team of the Clinical Psychology Unit (UNINPSI) of the *Universidad Pontificia Comillas*, Madrid, with some guidelines for the psychological care of religious communities and priestly life:

[https://www.revistaecclesia.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/guia\\_cuidado\\_psicologico\\_uninpsi.pdf](https://www.revistaecclesia.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/guia_cuidado_psicologico_uninpsi.pdf)

6. The isolation that we are following in our communities requires reflection as Augustinian religious, so that we can take care of our spiritual life. It is about paying attention to the small details, which Pope Francis reminds us. From the Augustinian Spirituality Institute, we offer some ideas that can be carried out individually if, given the circumstances, it is not possible to do so communally:

a. Read Sacred Scripture using the method of *Lectio Divina* (cf. CC 91) in four moments: *lectio* (quiet reading), *meditatio* (meditation examining one's life), *contemplatio* (prayerful dialogue with the Lord), *actio* (concrete practice in life)

b. Read texts of our father, Saint Augustine, especially the Commentary on the Psalms. They can be found on the internet in the various languages: <http://www.augustinus.it/>

c. Pray lauds and vespers in a calm and creative way. It is an opportunity to avoid routine and to resume a yearning for liturgical prayer (cf. CC 90).

d. Meditate at least a half an hour each day (cf. CC 86) and resume personal dialogue with the Lord. Now is a good time to take time to meet with Him, we who talk so much about Him.

e. Intentions in the Eucharist and also intercessions. Following the example of the Pope, we can offer the Eucharist for an intention related to the situation we are experiencing: for the coronavirus sufferers, for the deceased by Covid-19 and their families, for the religious who risk their lives to assist the sick, for the families restricted to be at home with the children, for the doctors and health workers who are giving their lives, for medical staffs and priests who died after assisting coronavirus patients, for those who have financial difficulties due to the pandemic, for the elderly who are alone and scared, for the civil authorities, for those who are incarcerated. It is a simple and effective way to help and allows us to think about the enormous scope of the sectors affected by this pandemic.

f. The Rosary and other simple devotional practices, especially of Augustinian content (cf. CC 103. 107), such as those contained in the Augustinian Devotional published by this Institute or in other books or texts easily accessible. They can also be sent to the laity.

g. Share the resources offered by dioceses and religious organizations, trying not to remain closed in on ourselves, but rather open ourselves to the wider church. Actively participate in days and moments of prayer. In order not to lose ourselves before the avalanche of proposals and possibilities, we suggest as a criterion to follow that of prioritizing those organized by the Universal Church, by the Order and by the respective diocese.

7. The present harsh reality offers us the opportunity to grow in fraternity and enhance our community dimension. Distance does not mean absence. May we take advantage of this forced isolation precisely to overcome pride and individualism. It is a time to heal the heart and review our ability to meet others, to strengthen our bonds of fraternity, to share more and in a different way, to be merciful, to understand and to forgive. It is time to value what is essential, what is truly important. Let us make the necessary choices to resume a truly fruitful community life. Hopefully, in the crisis, we will find ways of renewal and hope.

The Lord walks with us in these bleak times. If we have eyes to see we can see that He is with us, He is in us, perhaps more than ever in a very clear and palpable way. The Lord's presence is always one of love and salvation, which calls us to a response of love. In the Cross and Resurrection of Christ we find the meaning of this difficult moment that we are living. Much more aware of our fragility and finitude, and with more humility, we trust in the God of Life, in the God of Love. *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life"* (Jn 6,68).

Rome, March 28, 2020



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Luis Marín".

Fr. Luis Marín de San Martín, O.S.A.

*President of the Institute of Augustinian Spirituality*