Vatican
News
Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis celebrates Mass March 12, 2020, in the chapel of his Vatican residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae. At the beginning of the liturgy, the pope encouraged people to pray for their government leaders, who must make difficult decisions to contain the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Pope Francis asked people to pray for government officials and leaders who are tasked with making critical decisions and taking drastic measures that may make people unhappy.

Each day at his livestreamed morning Mass, the pope has been dedicating each liturgy to people affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Let us keep praying together for the ill, their relatives, for parents with children at home, but most of all I would ask that you pray for authorities," the pope said at the beginning of the Mass March 12.

Government authorities, he said, "must make decisions and many times they have to decide on measures that the people do not like. But it is for our own good."

Many times these officials "feel alone, not understood," he said. "Let us pray for our governing leaders who have to make decisions on these measures, that they feel accompanied by people's prayers."

The Italian government announced March 11 new measures in effect at least until March 25 mandating the complete closure across the country of all commercial and retail businesses, except for grocery stores, drug stores, tobacco shops, gas stations, newsstands and banks. Factories and farms were required to adopt increased measures to maintain worker safety, and essential services, such as utilities, public transportation and the post office, would still be functioning with safety protocols in place.

The stricter measures came as the number of new cases and deaths related to the virus continued to spike. At least 800 people have died and there are currently at least 10,000 known cases of infection, according to the Italian health ministry March 11.

In his homily at the Mass, the pope reflected on the problem of indifference — when people are very well informed and aware of bad things happening around them, but

the news doesn't "reach the heart" or move them with compassion.

Such indifference is displayed in the day's Gospel story (Lk 16:19-31) of Lazarus, the poor man, at the rich man's door — a man who dined sumptuously each day and did not even share the scraps.

The rich man was "very, very informed, but his heart was closed. Information did not reach the heart of this rich man; he was not able to be moved by others' ordeals," the pope said.

"This happens to us, too," he said. "We all know — because we hear it on the news or in the papers — how many children suffer from hunger today in the world, how many children don't have the medicine they need, how many can't go to school."

People know, but they dismiss it as somehow part of life and go on with their own lives because "this information does not reach the heart," he said.

What people think, know and feel are all detached from each other, he said. "The heart is cut off from the head; they are indifferent."

"Perhaps even those of us here in Rome, we are worried because the stores are closed" and experience other inconveniences, "and we forget about the starving children, we forget those poor people at the nations' borders seeking freedom, these forced migrants who are fleeing from hunger and war and only find walls, a wall made of iron, barbed wire."

"We live in indifference," he said, the indifference of being "well informed but not feeling other people's reality."

The pope asked that people pray for the grace of not becoming indifferent, that "all the information of human pain that we have reaches the heart and moves us to do something for others."

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