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Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis prays in front of the Blessed Sacrament at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul March 27. Earlier he blessed the city off in the background. (CNS/The Catholic Spirit/Dave Hrbacek)

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Martin Buber, an existential philosopher, asks us a question that seems inescapable in these times of pandemic:

> We ask ourselves about hope for this moment. With this, those of us who question ourselves perceive it not only as extremely distressing, but also as a moment where no different perspectives appear, where the future is not presented to us as a time of clarity and elevation. And yet, precisely because we seek a better perspective, we speak of hope.

With his first letter, Peter reminded the early Christians in Asia Minor to "always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (3:15). So in the face of this current coronavirus outbreak, what reason for hope do we give as believers in Jesus?

In just a few weeks, life has changed us in a drastic and decisive way as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic that is ravaging our world. It is impossible not to feel vulnerable in the face of this situation for so many reasons. Because of the uncertainty of its true scope. Because of the implications it will have for our future life. Because of the women and men who will be impacted by it in the days, weeks and months to come.

Even more, it hurts to know that many are dying regardless of the efforts being made by medical systems and governments, in the midst of the fragility of all our institutions and social structures. And so many more will continue to see their lives extinguished in the face of a situation that makes us feel powerless.

In view of this, it is essential to try to read this reality through the eyes of our faith. For those of us believers in Jesus, the current moment presents us a chance to offer the essence of our experience of being fragile followers and redeemed sinners of a project of God's kingdom here and now for which we are all called to be co-creators. A project that in the end, despite our limitations and short horizon, would possibly give way to a new society of justice, fraternity and solidarity, where what was previously considered despicable or excluded will be the cornerstone for weaving new life. That is, a genuine "apocalyptical hope" that goes beyond the innumerable rivers of ink that are flowing these days with narratives of terror that rob us of the

true meaning of the apocalypse about the deepest hope — the one that overcomes all despair and that decrees the certainty of the final victory of life over death and light over darkness.

Apocalypse literally means "revelation," that is, in the times of greatest desolation, where death seems to have the last word and where evil seems to prevail, we are called to encounter God's revelation in his absolute promise never to abandon his beloved sons and daughters. The uncontainable strength of a God of life will offer us a new day. To accomplish this, he calls us to a profound conversion.

This must be our hope, the invitation to transform our reality step by step, here and now.

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The perspective of hope must be the essential element of any look at our situation of living in the heart of this pandemic. That doesn't mean naivety or an idealized view of a non-existent reality. Instead, it's hope in the certainty of knowing we're called to be participants in providing a firm and consistent response toward conversion, and according to times, places and persons — each key to discernment in the tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola. We are called to make ourselves aware that our actions will be part of the journey to overcome this crisis in a communitarian way, and with an unavoidable option for the most vulnerable and excluded of our societies in the time of this pandemic and beyond it.

We must associate our hope with the discontent and denouncing of situations of structural sin that become more visible in this growing crisis: in the midst of obscene planetary inequality, and in the poverty and opportunism of many supposed civil servants at so many levels and in so many spaces. Hope for these times must be strengthened by the ability to overcome the predominant throwaway culture, which is sustained by an individualistic vision for one's own benefit and well-being. If we are to get out of this situation, and we have no doubt that we will, it will be together and by opening new unseen pathways.

Above all, our hope cannot be naive, sustained by a childish faith that puts everything in the hands of a quasi-magical God, or a God who acts as a cruel judge who's alien to our passage through the valley of death, saving some while discarding

others.

Rather, our hope must be rooted on the certainty of the mystery of a God who is acting and present in our reality, despite our inability to understand or perceive it. A God whose presence comes to life in the smallest and most unexpected gestures of solidarity and encounter. A God whose presence makes the difference between life and death every day: in the daily honest expressions of love that emerge in spite of uncertainty, in the decisions that make a difference for those who most need a presence or a comforting word, in the ability to recognize the need to stay at home so as not to be the cause of further spread of the virus, and from there to the most transcendental structural actions for the care of life of all, and especially the most vulnerable.

At the end of this journey, each of us must ask ourselves how this experience has transformed us from within, and in the depths of our being, to be new women and men in so many explicit and credible ways. With that, we must also assume the task of reconfiguring our lives and societies in coherence with this call to profound conversion, so that how we live has a meaning beyond simply surviving. A way of living that is more than predominance of the strongest or remaining in the sensation of failure due to so many irrecoverable and irremediable losses that result from injustice, inequality, violence and a lack of fraternity so often naturalized in us.

God's promise assures that evil and unjustified death will never have the last word, no matter how much it seems to have reached the top. God's promise in the apocalypse is the culmination of the Gospel in which the commitment of an all-loving Father assures us that he is with us until the end of time, and that we will encounter light and hope, so by no means can this be an end.

The coronavirus pandemic is an invitation to believe irremediably in this creator God, and in his promise to accompany us as we assume our own role as co-creators until we come out of this situation through and with hope.

Toward the end of the Book of Revelation (21:3-5), the one seated on the throne said:

> "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no

> more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away." The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true."

May these deaths that we cannot prevent not be in vain. May they be registered in our pupils and hearts as a wake-up call. May the many other and constant daily deaths not pass by us. May we do everything in our power to reverse this mode of society of exclusion, and give way to a new society of encounter and existential co-responsibility.

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This story appears in the **Coronavirus** feature series. View the full series.