

Live „infected”, die „infecting”

“Dear sister, you will undoubtedly be in great care, knowing that I am serving in this temporary hospital for epidemics, having not written to you since I arrived in this town. I could not, because I have lacked time. Now that ... I can breathe a little, I take advantage of the time I have free to get you out of pain ... ”

No, it is not a text written in 2020, nor in these months of 2021, when the pandemic provokes our conversations about safety distances, about numbers and statistics, about spikes in infections, sick people, deaths ... We, so accustomed to letting ourselves be informed with a single digital movement on the many pages of the web, today approach this letter (of March 7) published in a newspaper, *El Ermitaño*, on Friday, March 14, 1872, in which we are told about a town: Calasanz, in Aragon, Spain. If you dare to let yourself be infected, continue reading the chronicle:

“When the population was attacked by this formidable guest, the Parish priest and the Surgeon died ... The horror, and the tremor was engraved on the foreheads of the bravest ... hardly their own relatives dared to approach (the poor)... (The sisters) having no hospital to gather the invaded poor, went to serve them in their homes ...

When this narrative is published, the writer, Fr. Palau, director of the newspaper, who had dared all his life to lose his serenity to "become upset" by human suffering [cf. *Fratelli tutti* 68], and who had not been able to write before, because he had lacked time, was already in Tarragona, since March 9, at C / Misericordia, on the 2nd floor of house No. 3 [Cf *Biographical news of the Rev. Francisco Palau y Quer*, collected and ordered by his loving children, the Carmelite Brothers of Education, Tarragona 1909, p. 31]. There, a "sudden" lung inflammation was manifesting itself. On Sunday the 17th he received Viaticum, on Monday the 18th the Anointing of the courageous;

"... all who attended ... contemplated and admired at the same time the unwavering faith and courage ... which always constituted during his life the firmness of his character and the greatness of his heart ... (The Hermit 4 April 1872).

Just after 7 in the morning on Wednesday 20, when the Holy Mass of Agony was celebrated for him in the Parish Church of San Juan del Puerto, Father Palau closed his eyes.

Father Palau is dead! What was the disease that led to the grave? Ah! ... it is known that his spirit was incessantly tortured by the bitter sorrow caused by the contemplation of so many of his brothers plunged into bitter affliction; He did all he could on his part to heal them or at least to alleviate them, but the wounds of a thousand victims, who came to his ears from every corner of the earth, imploring in vain for a remedy and a consolation, were as many wounds that they pierced his heart with pain, and who knows if that was the cause of his

death? if so, happy a thousand times! for he will have sacrificed his life for the sake of the most ardent charity, for the most cruel of martyrdoms. (The Hermit March 28, 1872)

Palau always knew how to live by allowing himself to be "infected", because he firmly believed in one Word:

"Whatever you do to your neighbors, you do to me, because I am them and they are the Church" (MR 8,12).

Sisters Juana and Teresa had come from Estadilla to be those "angels of charity" for the population of Calasanz that was struggling with the typhus epidemic, and Father Palau did not hesitate to come to their aid. He chose to touch the flesh, the heart, the soul of whoever crossed his path. Only this way could it be said of him that he had died as he had lived, that he had died ...

"*ss Catholics die, as the just die, as saints die*" (El Ermitaño, March 28, 1872).

His heart was already wounded with love:

"My beloved, my Spouse, my Sister, you have mortally wounded my heart; with a look ... you have made yourself known ... with your look ... my heart has been mortally wounded: your look has killed me" (MR 2,11).

And only this way could he die, infecting many men and women of his time, and of our time, with the concrete love for Christ, the total Christ, for the Church, the Body of Christ, which today, in its beauty, continues to be wounded in others, the most vulnerable.

Are we the ones who have been infected by it? Do we want to be?

We all know our brothers and sisters, who dare, even today, not to keep "safe distances" and allow themselves to be infected with creativity by the thoughts or wishes of others, even though with this they have to leave and allow themselves to die to embrace the Life. Can you make their names present?

That we may know how to put names and concrete faces to those who today continue to infect us with their closeness, with their understanding, with their example and dedication; that we learn to become a neighbor who cultivates every day the art of bandaging with the oil of contemplative gaze and tenderness, and the wine of listening and compassion, the wounds of our brothers / sisters who, perhaps very close to us, have been deprived, excluded, on the path of death.

That in these days in which we journey towards Easter, in these days in which we celebrate, as a Palautian family, the Easter of Fr. Palau, his passage to Life, we may know how to allow ourselves to be "infected", "altered"; that we may be willing to bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others, to carry each other on the shoulders¹.

¹ Cf. Fratelli Tutti 70