

## Are we still able to make sacrifices?

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*Torn between the immense effort of the health practitioners and the sense of responsibility of millions of citizens on one side and thousands who do not want to make sacrifices on the other side, Italy is now a country with two souls, a bipolar nation striving to get out from the darkest phase of its history since the Second World War.*

### The latest measures

Segrate, 10 km from Milan: the message from the police car's speaker echoes all over the empty streets: <<We recommend staying home and going out only for emergencies, respecting 1-meter distance and avoiding crowds.>>

It looks – and feels – like a post-apocalyptic scene.

With more than 12,000 cases and more than 800 deaths (as of March 12), Italy is facing the deadliest coronavirus outbreak outside China.

A couple of days ago, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte signed the so-called Resto a Casa (“I Stay Home”) decree, enforcing stricter measures in an effort to contain the outbreak.

Italy is now under complete lockdown and this is the first move of this kind in an industrialized country in decades.

The decree forbids any movement of people except those who have demonstrable emergencies, who are requested to show a paper with which they can prove if law enforcement officers stop them.

It is forbidden to gather in groups without respecting the 1-meter distance between people.

On the night of March 11, new measures have been introduced, shutting down shops, restaurants, cafes, and bars. Only supermarkets and pharmacies are open and are letting in only a few people at a time, with other costumers waiting outside.

Religious activities such as masses and Friday Muslim prayers are suspended and people can visit places of worship only if they respect the 1-meter rule.

People who die, will not have a proper funeral surrounded by their relatives, since funerals - implying the gathering of many people – are forbidden.

### Incapable of Making Sacrifices

Unfortunately, however, these strict measures seem insufficient for two main reasons. The first one is intuitive: COVID-19 spreads extremely easily, and if millions of people still go to work, they can infect other persons.

The second reason is socially more critical, and relates to many people's incapability to make even the smallest sacrifices. Here are a few examples.

In the evening on March 8, just a few hours before the issuing of the decree banning people from leaving or entering Lombardy – the region with the highest number of infected people - a draft leaked on the media.

This led thousands of southerners living in Milan to rush to the train stations in the chaotic effort to catch the last trains and head back south.

The magnitude of their reckless action is apparent: by doing so, they jeopardized the very meaning of the new measures and put their own families in the south at higher risk.

To make matters worse, Italy is also experiencing violent riots in 27 prisons all over the territory. A total of 12 inmates have now died during these riots triggered by emergency restrictions – such as the suspension of family visits - imposed amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

50 prisoners also escaped from the jail of Foggia, in Puglia, but most of them have been rearrested soon after running away.



Inmates, like the rest of the Italian society, are now requested to make temporary sacrifices like not seeing their family for the sake of public safety, but many of them are not willing to cooperate.

What is even worse is that dozens of relatives took the streets – obviously in big gatherings – to support the riots.

There are thousands of people who still underestimate the risk and do not understand that, by staying home, we can slow down the contagions, thus giving hospitals space and time to treat all the people in need.

Some nightlife places are still quite busy, and thousands of young people complain about the restriction imposed on their “right to have fun”.

If social responsibility does not grow quickly, intensive care units all over Italy will be forced to implement the heartbreaking principles of the so-called catastrophe medicine.

Catastrophe medicine is a medical specialty that operates in disastrous circumstances, in which doctors are forced to give priority to patients who have more chances to survive, thus leaving the elderly and people with pre-existing health conditions behind.

The moral and psychological impact of this would be unprecedented. A country that has to choose who to take care of is a country on its knees and all this might become true just because of the selfishness of some.

## The Noble Side of the Country



As always happens during collective emergencies, coronavirus is simultaneously showing the worst and the best of mankind.

On the noble side of the country we have doctors, nurses, and health workers who are working relentlessly, enduring 12-hours shifts, and being constantly exposed to the virus.

On the same side there are hundreds of business owners who chose to shut down their stores, restaurants, and cafes even if it is not mandatory yet, prioritizing public safety over money.

Last but by no means least, there are millions of people who decided to stay home as much as they can. These women and men are aware that the sacrifices they are asked to make are small: staying home, giving up on bars and movies for a while, do not gather in groups.

The World Health Organization (WHO) praised Italy for its 'genuine sacrifices' but not everyone is willing to join the collective effort.

### What is a sacrifice?

The word "sacrifice" comes from Latin *sacrificium*, a term formed by the words *sacer* ("sacred") and *facere* ("to make", "to do").

Making sacrifices means doing something spiritually and morally crucial, worth of the utmost respect as something sacred.

Nevertheless, for many of us making sacrifices is just unthinkable, and this is due to different reasons.

First, humans are becoming less and less far-sighted: if the benefit of an action is not immediate or immediately visible, it is just not worth doing it.

Unfortunately, however, we know that the results of the containment measures start to show only a few weeks later, as it is now happening in the Chinese province of Wuhan.

The second major reason relates to the distorted – and frankly cynical - narrative about COVID-19 that is becoming more and more popular in the West, according to which "only old people die."

If it is true that the lethality rate is closely linked to the age of the patient (people older than 80 have a mortality rate of 14.8%), this does not mean that coronavirus is "just a normal flu".

People with pre-existing health conditions such as immune deficiency, cardiovascular diseases or diabetes are at much higher risk if contracting the virus, and these conditions do not hit only older individuals, but this seems hard to understand.

With the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "A coward is incapable of exhibiting love. It is the prerogative of the brave."

This is the time, in Italy and anywhere else, for all of us to show love for humanity by being brave and wise.

Governing uncertainty is the duty of rulers, but being responsible is the duty of citizens.

