

Dear Mom And Dad In Heaven: It Is April Again We Are Locked-down, But This Time Not For Being Killed!

It is April again, and we are on lockdown but this time not for being killed! This time is very different, the world has been shaken by an infectious virus. It spreads fast like the fire of burning houses on the hills or like the screams of innocent people we heard in those few evenings we stayed locked inside our neighbor's tiny home before moving to St Joseph's college. In many parts of the world, like Italy, Spain, the UK, Iran and France, the virus is killing like the vicious men who came to take you from the school. Humanity is shrinking, some are taking it lightly, but most are gravely worried and staying indoors. In many places, governments are forcing people to stay at home leaving vulnerable people unable to earn a living. Unlike then, at least this time here, the authorities are taking care of people, distributing aid to the most vulnerable. Church services have been suspended to avoid mass contamination but church leaders are supportive which feels so strange. I wonder if trusting them makes me naïve. Maybe, they have learnt their lesson?

You left us before the internet conquered the world. For the most part, this is a good thing as it keeps us connected in this time of forced isolation. But it has also become a tool for spreading misinformation, with too much fake news spreading globally about the virus from those who take it carelessly. Rwanda is not immune to such trends. We are now dealing with two viruses: covid-19 (coronavirus) -which we can cure if we comply with measures put in place; and the "rapidly spreading fake news" from those who plotted our death; though defeated they never ceased to deny their shameful deeds.

This time around, they mostly use the internet to poke our wounds and advance their fake news trying to distract the world from remembering with us. This is another virus we've been dealing with since you left. It is even harder to beat than coronavirus, just like those many years of discrimination and dehumanization we lived through together before the "Final Solution". To keep safe, we are asked firmly to stay in our homes. We are trying our best to stay home to keep everyone safe. And we continue to defeat deniers' virus too what so ever their games. Our beloved country – "Rwanda has changed for good and for the better".

As it has been our ritual, this time for the 26th year, we were wondering what flowers, what memories, what prayers and what news we would give you as we faithfully spend the Kwibuka period. We never forgot and neither will we. We remember you every single day but when Kwibuka comes, it takes us back to then, we feel the heavy rain – even when the sun is shining – we hear the screaming voices and smell the stench as if the slaughtering had started again.

Well, we still have many things to tell you. To be honest, it does not come from us only anymore. Your grandchildren ask a lot about you and, though we try, there is still so much more to be told. The other day, when the lock-down started, they asked why you would not tell God to chase the virus away. They know you are in heaven and they know heaven is where God, the Almighty, lives, so they know you're up there with him. Every night, we pray and they ask you to intercede to God to stop the virus from spreading and taking away the lives of so many. We hope you hear their voices. We pray together in their room; we let them lead the prayer, like you used to let us pray before sleeping. We close our eyes like we used to do and from deep inside my heart, listening to their soft sweet voices praying, it takes me closer to your presence. It brings me back to when we were all still together and I feel like I want to touch you, but then I remember that I can't.

It really hurts. Do you know why? Because I hardly remember your faces. None of the beautiful photos survived. Everything was either looted or burnt. So the memories remain but I have no images to remind me of what you looked like and it makes me feel so sad, only to come back to the reality and realize that it was my daughter and son praying. Like you used to, after praying we hug and bless them with a cross sign on their front. They love it the same way we enjoyed it then. That moment is so beautiful at least it helps me forget that I was sad for not remembering your faces and am returned to feeling peaceful as we head to bed.

This time around I must say that your grandchildren have become so curious about you. Schools are closed and now it is the Easter holidays so they have more free time with us and they ask a lot more questions than before. I think it is because they heard some of their friends sharing stories about their grandparents. My daughter once asked why so many kids have their grandmothers but not grandfathers! She went on listing her classmates who still have their grandmas. I sadly answered that she is lucky to have one grandmother at least! My daughter loves reading, so I think I will put more memories into writing so she will enjoy reading for her brother about you and about our life together.

Last year, I gave your grandchildren a gift: "That Child is Me" and they connected so deeply with the story. A year before, I wrote a letter to you about "The Legacy of History". I could not help but create an audio-recording and then a great video from the letter. How fulfilling that was and for my kids and many other kids too to find content that could help them connect with their grandparents, uncles and aunties in heaven! But Let me not go far and forget to tell you about this year. 26 years since you were taken from us and never returned, you know we remained locked with no hope of survival. This time we are also locked down in our homes. Guess why? Not because bad people are back, no. Because of the

virus and this time, it is for everyone, not just us. What a relief.

This time we actually feel safe to be locked down. We feel protected, not ambushed or surrounded like when your killers put roadblocks and spread to all corners of the country to track everyone down. The fear is not for being killed this time. Rather the fear is for going out and catching the virus. Not only would we risk our own lives, but also the lives of your grandchildren. When we occasionally make it to the market, we come back, wash hands sensibly before we can elbow each other –our new way of greeting. The very few times I do go out, I take a bath when I return and feel much more clean to touch them. No more hand shaking until the virus is gone.

The virus is just dangerous. The same way neighbors turned against us in a blink of an eye, the virus also spreads like the betrayal we endured. It is terrible and that is why staying home is survival for everyone. It keeps everyone safe. Unfortunately, we won't be able to go out to lay a wreath on your graves, at least you Mom because Dad's body was never found. Nonetheless, we do hope He found you and that you are both together in heaven. So keep your good hands together and pray for us. We will be remembering like always. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for your love and protection even when you were defenseless. You loved us till the last second. It is a great thing we have embraced since you left. Pain and hatred would have been too heavy to carry –and also too cruel like this virus. After all, love shall prevail, so we won't give up – love will always provide the way out till we meet again to reunite in the love of our Almighty God.

The virus is just dangerous. The same way neighbors turned against us in a blink of an eye, the virus also spreads like the betrayal we endured. It is terrible and that is why staying home is survival for everyone. It keeps everyone safe. Unfortunately, we won't be able to go out to lay a wreath on your graves, at least you Mom because Dad's body was never

found. Nonetheless, we do hope He found you and that you are both together in heaven. So keep your good hands together and pray for us. We will be remembering like always. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for your love and protection even when you were defenseless. You loved us till the last second. It is a great thing we have embraced since you left. Pain and hatred would have been too heavy to carry –and also too cruel like this virus. After all, love shall prevail, so we won't give up – love will always provide the way out till we meet again to reunite in the love of our Almighty God.