

## QUARANTINE

*thoughts from Church President Gijsbertus van Hattem, Antwerp*

### Worldwide Quarantine

The world is in quarantine, 1/3 of the world's population is currently being asked not to go outdoors unnecessarily. According to the dictionary, quarantine is a temporary isolation of persons, animals or things that could be infected with germs. Where does the word come from? According to the etymological dictionary, it is the 'isolation of persons suspected of an infection upon the arrival of a ship', and the word goes back to the 'quaranta giorni' or forty days, which the Venice authorities c. 1400 fixed as duration of this insulation. The Italian 'quaranta' goes back to the Latin 'quadraginta'.

Forty! The number forty plays a major role in the Bible. The Flood lasted for forty days and nights, forty years lasted the journey of the people of Israel to the promised land, after forty days of fasting Jesus was tempted in the desert, after his resurrection on Easter, Jesus appeared to his disciples for forty days until his Ascension, only forty days after childbirth a woman was clean again, etc. The forty days in which we now find ourselves as a church, from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday (not counting Sundays) go back to the forty days that the Bible uses. A time of repentance and reflection in preparation for Easter.

The current lock-down in our country could well last forty days. From initially three weeks to April 5, it has already been extended to five weeks until April 19 with the option of extending another two weeks to May 3.

### Change

In the Bible, the number 40 represents a change, a preparation time for something else or something new, something better. From unclean to clean, from dead to life, from old to new, for example. In the current quarantine, we naturally hope that afterwards the Covid-19 virus will be manageable.

However, further changes are on the way due to the partial stagnation of the economy. After all the commotion about the climate problem in recent years, the earth suddenly has the chance to recover. Air quality above lock-down areas has already been markedly improved, rivers are becoming cleaner, normal

crime is declining, and so on. One could say that the earth settles down. Ironically, because what humans normally could not achieve, now happens naturally as a result of a pandemic.

There is also a lot of change between people, hopefully for the better. There is more time to spend together at home. Life is less hurried, people no longer can and have to go everywhere. How, for example, will our travel behavior look like after the crisis? Wasn't it a bit exaggerated that an average of ten thousand planes were in the air at any time of the day?

To keep it with the Bible, changes are coming. In this 40 days of Lent, an additional time to reflect is given to us, to reflect on the future of our earth, on our relationship with God and with those around us. By staying more time at home, we at a sudden have more time to read God's Word. What changes are desirable? And how can we as Christians play a role in this? Remembering the words from Romans 8:28, "We now that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

The churches are still closed for the time being, we are in the desert, but the churches will open again, the promised land lays ahead, and then we will thank and praise God with renewed courage and faith, and again receive His Word and Sacrament.