

The homeless first

10 February 2021

Caritas wrote to the health authorities asking for priority vaccination of the homeless who use the parish canteens, assimilating them to the patients of the Assisted Health Residences. It is a request for responsibility and sharing towards those who are considered by some as the “waste” of this individualistic society in a dramatic pandemic emergency for everyone, but especially for the least. We have houses to protect ourselves and to spend the waiting time, connected to the world by the web, whereas they neither have these facilities nor a home but the sky with cold and heat, rain and sun. They do not have “connections” except those of fellow travellers and of us when we put some small change in their hands; we have a bed to stay in if infected and sick, they don’t have; they don’t have a bed, but only a cardboard spread out on the sidewalks of the streets or makeshift shelters; we can wash ourselves and take care of our hygiene, whereas they can’t. They don’t have showers, soap, towels; we have a health service that welcomes and treats us, they are often not even registered in our health system, they do not have a general practitioner, they have no treatment; we have work and food to feed ourselves in abundance, they do not, they have no work and no food; we have masks and individual protections, they don’t, they don’t have masks, if not those we threw on the street and then collected and used by them without worrying about the risk of contagion; we are sure that we will soon be vaccinated, they are not, they are not expecting anything. Vaccinating the homeless is, therefore, a priority of equity, attention to the “discarded” of our welfare society, an assumption of responsibility because they, the homeless, exist because we have turned our gaze elsewhere so as not to take charge of their fragility, their fears, their existential poverty. Vaccinating the homeless is choosing to change the course of our civil society: not first the guaranteed ones, we guaranteed ones, but first those who have no security and are marked by experiences of marginalization and poverty. A society that puts the least in the first place is a society that chooses to be concretely supportive and authentic in welcoming, because even the homeless are living members of our communities, not “waste” of humanity to be scrapped and ignored. Now we wait to see what course will be chosen by those who temporarily take the helm of strategic health decisions at this time, because we, as far as possible, are already at the service of the least and ready to vaccinate them all.

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