

Friday March 20, 2020

A Letter from you Pastor

As your pastor, I can't pretend to know the ultimate reason for this, or the final implications for this sudden change of our lives, but it is important to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and understanding at this time and we may start to understand. This is not only about a virus, or a potential bogeyman, this set of life-circumstances has been building up for a long time now in our culture. I see this as a release valve on the pressure cooker.

Is there an infectious agent out there which is serious, **yes**. Does it warrant this response on a worldwide level? **Probably**. For now it seems so, but time will tell for sure – much knowledge is imperfect until time reveals more.

Ultimately it may remain to be seen, but I do believe this is important for us for many reasons which are just as important as the danger at hand. It's the way we were living. This is a real LENT for us – a real slowing down.

Should we follow and obey our leaders? **Yes**, in the sense that right now it is beyond our understanding what we are experiencing --- we don't have all the knowledge of our leaders. There is a reason why scientists are scientists and doctors are doctors. We have a Bishop who has mandated certain measures and he does so with the knowledge that he has; he is a wise man and I am able in good conscience to follow his proclamations. We should follow his lead; God has put him in charge of our local family the Church. (He is a gift to us. Pray for him at this time.)

Should we give up all of our civil rights every time there is a new virus/threat in the future? This is a bigger question which will need to be examined in time. That remains to be seen. I fear that this is a new trend in reacting that may be snowballing, and there is the danger in the future that people may become tired of such limitations and then if there is a more dangerous infectious agent than this one then they may not react in the best way, having been worn down by severe measures on other occasions.

But let us look at the bigger picture; God acts in history even when we don't quite understand what is happening. He knows the outcome even when it is still unfolding for us. There are good things that are happening through the grace of God – look around. For no particular reason I've noticed that a couple of my relationships have been rebooted; friends I have not spoken to for a while, because of circumstances, have become again a regular part of my life even though we are physically separated.

Maybe we had become too comfortable with our situations, not thinking we need anyone – now we are all forced to see that yes, maybe we were living beyond our means. We may face the loss of a job or paycheck and are forced to ask the question "What do we really need?" "Where can I cut back?" "Who is going to help me?" "Am I going to be able to support my family?"

We have each other, and we need to re-learn this.

This is important for the Christian life - to not let things of the world get so out of control that we lose sight of what is necessary for our spiritual development and ultimate blessedness. To not let our own groove of life obstruct us from the needs of our brothers and sisters right in front of us.

Perhaps we find ourselves with more time with which we do not know what to do? Perhaps this is a time we can learn a new skill or hobby, or read that book, or do that project that we would not have been able to focus on before. Perhaps we had stopped listening to our kids or spouse, and been so “busy” that we remained in our own minds and problems. Maybe this is calling us to slow down and be more present to our immediate families and friends. Not just in body, but in mind and time.

Prayer is called to be more mature and more in depth, at this time – no, we are not able to go to mass publicly – but we should not lose heart; there are great expanses in the world where they may be able to have mass even only once monthly, or even yearly, and the people’s faith is strong, and people *crave* the mass and the sacraments there. Think of South America and Africa in rural places and places that do not have enough vocations for the large population.

We should be praying with them because when things get better for us, they may still have to wait a long time for the sacraments.

Please keep in mind at this time not only our sick and our families who have to find a way to have their kids cared for while out of school for an extended period of time, but also consider that small businesses will take a hit from these volatile days in which we live. Please consider patronizing them soon after our group quarantine. They do not have the same profit margin that the big-box stores have and so it’s more difficult in times of crisis for them to make their bills and pay their employees. Smaller businesses are the backbone of the American economy and often are the first to donate to the Church and our community since they are closer to our people – they know us. Big-box stores usually are not as quick to donate to small charitable causes (though there are exceptions.)

So when you return to shopping, especially for things like appliances or bigger ticket items that it’s better for our local economy *to shop at small businesses* – it keeps our neighbors employed and supports our local community. One thing we will see when this is over, is that we need to support those closest to us in Christian Charity. Sometimes the choice of where we spend our money is not only a moral choice but a choice in love for our brothers and sisters and their jobs.

Finally, cultivate hunger for the mass and the Eucharist, pray that our little church may be able to survive in the future with less, pray that we will not squander this time but find ourselves richer in prayer, love for our families and friends, and richer in the experience of a life slowed down.

In the meantime, learn to pray the Liturgy of the Hours so that when we come back together this can be a regular practice in our church, as was taught in the mission. Resources include the following: ***universalis.com***, ***ebreviary.com***, and ***ibreviary.com***. We can find the Liturgy of the Hours there and print out the hours of the day and pray them, or access them by our smartphones. This is the Church’s prayer and prayer unites us even when we are physically separated. We are all part of the Mystical Body of Christ.

God bless you and be assured of my continued prayers for you.

In the Love of Jesus Christ, and memory of St. John Vianney,

Father John Payne