

MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP

Finding peace in the midst of new COVID restrictions and confinement

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we are undergoing a third “Stay at Home Order” under the recommendations of health authorities and the explicit directives of the Ontario government. When I learned last Friday that we would be confined until May 20th with even more restrictions, I let a little wind of discouragement blow through me: “Not again,” I said to myself! I thought of my 93-year-old mother who has not had a visitor for a month and who will have to wait another month before seeing me again, like so many other elderly, vulnerable and lonely people who have been left alone on several occasions since the beginning of the pandemic. I was also thinking of the many merchants and workers who see their income melt away with each lockdown and who struggle to support their families; I was thinking of the many depressions and discouragements that will possibly lead some to take their own lives; I was thinking of all my activities and meetings that will have to be continued by Zoom instead of being done in person; I was pessimistically anticipating the new restrictions that will once again be imposed on the number of faithful present at Mass and at other liturgies....

I was tempted to shout out loud to the government and the health authorities: “Enough! Don’t you see that we are getting tired of all your restrictions and lockdowns? Why do you only report the deaths from COVID every day in the media? Do you not count all the people who die because they cannot be operated on in time? Have the other people who die for all sorts of reasons other than COVID become undocumented, unimportant people? Are you not also seeing all the elderly and abandoned people who have lost the desire to live and who eat less and less every day because of these forced isolations, and which will cause them to die prematurely because of the morbid loneliness that overwhelms them?” Some of the faithful of the diocese have also written to me asking for advice or asking me to undertake with them a crusade of protests to the government, to challenge all the restrictions and lockdowns that are imposed on us, especially those that concern our places of worship.

After several hours of musing, more or less pessimistically, I prayed for peace and to make sense of it all. The next day, I seemed to have a better understanding that this pandemic is allowed by God. Our so-called modern society, which makes almost no reference to God in its morals, in its speeches and ways of behaving, has more or less rejected God as Father and Savior. Our Creator has lost his rightful place in the hearts of many. And because God, by his omnipotent and omnipresent divine nature, can use everything to draw us to himself – and because he is a loving Father who longs for us to return to him wholeheartedly – he uses these lockdowns and restrictions to make us

reflect and to bring us to conversion, which alone can give us profound and true peace of mind.

Strengthened by this conviction and trusting in God's love and merciful justice, I better understood why Christians must view our present reality through the eyes of God. The Christian is a "giver of meaning" who is able to lead people who are looking for meaning in life and to invite them on the road that leads to true freedom, the freedom that only God can give to the one who opens his or her heart wholeheartedly to Him.

I will close by sharing with you a reflection that a Christian woman recently shared on Facebook. Please feel free to share this wise thought with your friends and with the people you meet. They could benefit greatly from this reflection:

"This is a mild setback compared to what faith has survived before. Jews and Christians were in worse situations so many times, when they were under the rule of an alien empire, enslaved, with their temples and houses of prayer burnt down, seized or closed, obliged to worship alien kings as their gods, persecuted, running away to foreign countries, hiding in exile, hiding in catacombs, you name it. Every time this happened, their communal services, prayers and psalms spread underground and they came back more numerous. I have smiled to myself a few times, when I attend online services. Not an underground anymore, now we're in the Internet cloud."
(Ms. Monica Do Coutto Monni, quoted with her permission)

Sincerely yours in the risen Christ,

+Guy Desrochers, C.Ss.R.

Bishop of Pembroke