



On the Pandemic Crisis

Nov 20, 2020

Archdiocese of Winnipeg - Many will find what I am about to say harsh and frightening, but now is the time. We in the Province of Manitoba have reached the critical phase of this pandemic. It affects all of us. It is no longer just a question of how many COVID cases there will be but, more importantly, how many cases there are already. We have let ourselves become less disciplined. It was easy to say, "let's meet up with friends", or, "just this once," run into the store without a mask. Maybe we looked the other way if there was not quite six feet between people. We became COVID fatigued.

We let ourselves be overwhelmed by what we thought we were losing, perhaps our connection with people and the conveniences in our lives. It became about **me** and what would make me feel better. But we know that is not the purpose of a Christian life. We are to love God and to love our neighbours. It is not about me. I see the protests against the restrictions placed on us in this time, people revolting against wearing a mask, social distancing, and staying at home. They say that it is their right to exercise the freedom to choose how to live their own lives. They suggest that those who follow the restrictions are just buying into fear propagated by the media and the government over something that is not real. Yes, we have rights but with rights comes responsibilities.

I could remind you of the Catholic Social Teachings which tell us that we live for the other. However, let's deal in facts. In the last week, there have been at least 1000 reported COVID cases. Of that we can expect 1% to 2% will be hospitalized. In the press briefing of November 15, 2020, it was reported that there are at least 3 hospitalizations per day from COVID. With recently expanded ICU beds there are 99 beds available and at least 92 are in use now. If you do the math it means that ICU beds will run out very shortly. Then what happens? Most of these acute care beds are in Winnipeg, so this affects those who get ill in other parts of the province and are usually transported to Winnipeg.

Here is what the government does not want to scare you with. When hospital beds run out, or life-saving equipment is all in use, and when there are not enough doctors, nurses and other health professionals to meet the need, people die. They die from COVID and they die from other non-COVID causes. A person has a heart attack. The ambulance comes but no hospital can accept the patient because there is no bed, no equipment, and no healthcare professional to look after them. They die. A frail elderly person becomes ill, either with COVID or some other cause, they die. Or if there is a very limited number of beds etc. to determine whether a person gets lifesaving care in a hospital the questions become how many years do they have to live, what is their quality of life, is there someone more "worthy" of the care. Who even decides who lives and dies and what criteria do they use? Have we even bothered to ask or have input into the life-saving decisions? People die who do not meet the criteria. They may not even be transported to the hospital but left at home.

We have been blessed with a health care system that has been available to all and so it is hard to contemplate that the doors could be closed to us. It is time to wake up. Even at this time, we have been given a lifeboat. **Stay home. Only have your immediate family at home. If you must go out, go for essentials only. Wear a mask, wash your hands and keep your distance.** This is not too much to ask and it will likely save your neighbour's life and maybe even your own. If we can do this there is light. We will be able to meet again, attend church services, and many other things. When we look back at this time, let us do it with pride that we did what we could to allow others to live. Proud because we lived out our Catholic Social Teachings, and we acted in such a way that we protected the human dignity of all, we acted in solidarity and we acted for the common good. We acted in LOVE.

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