

SIDE EFFECTS

White Sox third baseman, Yoan Moncada, spoke recently about the side-effects he's still experiencing – fatigue and weakness – from his bout with the virus earlier this year that kept him out of summer camp with the team. Fortunately though, as of a week ago, it didn't seem to be hurting his or the team's performance. (I hope I didn't jinx that by writing this on September 5th when the Sox were alone again in 1st place.)

As frightening as this virus can be, the physical side-effects for those who recover can be long-lasting and debilitating as well. But as important as it is these days to take reasonable precautions to protect our own health and the health of others, it seems to me that there are other side effects from these mask-wearing, quarantine months which could be even more long lasting and, to my mind, just as frightening as contracting or even surviving a potentially deadly virus.

Following a cemetery interment service a while ago, a family member approached me and said, "I feel like I need to give you a hug, but I know I can't." My family were never huggers, and I still remember the days early on in my priesthood when I shied away from parishioners who tried to hug me in support or gratitude. Finally, someone who is now a dear friend almost shouted at me after Mass one day, "Get over it and give me a hug!" I had finally become comfortable with embraces when the sexual misconduct crisis of the 90's arose and such displays of affection became a bit questionable, though not forbidden. Now, the director of the Illinois Department of Public Health has opined that even hand-shaking will be a thing of the past and mask-wearing will become commonplace. And **that** to me is more frightening than any virus.

We humans are social beings. Psychological studies have shown, beyond a doubt, that isolation from others can cause irreparable damage to a person's mental and emotional health. And today's scriptures, speaking about the necessity of forgiveness, underline that essential, relational dimension of our lives, not only as human beings, but as children of God. We need to **see** each other – not just each other's eyes. Someone said to me the other day, "I can never tell if someone is smiling or frowning at me." And we have to feel free to embrace, not just bump elbows. It's how God made us!

The Wisdom author of today's first reading speaks of hugging, though in a negative sense: "Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight." I worry that these strange days will teach us to hug tight, not hate or anger – or one another – but **fear**. I'm not suggesting that we ignore the present danger, but simply that we not allow fear to be the side-effect that shapes our lives forever and wins in the end. That would be worse than any virus, that's my only fear, because it's **not** how God made us!

Fr. Bob