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Pastoral Message to the Faithful from Bishop Joe S. Vásquez regarding recently released vaccines for COVID-19

I am grateful for the recent news from Governor Abbott that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has earmarked over 1.4 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines for the state of Texas to start arriving in mid-December. While this is wonderful news, we know that vaccinating an entire country will take several months and our precautions to stop the spread of the virus remain as important as ever.

As these vaccines have been developed, concerns as to the moral permissibility of using them have arisen from the faithful, particularly the vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has deliberated on these concerns thoroughly and specifically clarified that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are not derived from cell lines originating from fetal tissue of aborted babies. While it is true that there was a tainted cell line used in confirmatory testing, Catholic moralists have determined that any cooperation in the evil of this tainted cell line is so remote, and the good to be gained for society so valuable, that one may take these vaccines in good conscience.

Brothers and sisters, I want to assure you that it is morally permissible to receive these vaccines.

The USCCB has also discerned that the AztraZeneca vaccine, while originating from fetal tissue of aborted babies, remains acceptable from a moral theology perspective, provided it is the only vaccine available in an area and will serve the health of the greater good of society.¹

Join me in continuing to pray for those who have lost their lives from COVID-19 and the families that have been affected. I also ask that we continue to pray for our health care workers who serve every day on the front lines of this battle against the pandemic, that God will give them the strength and grace they need to serve all people.

Following the emergency approval of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, Bishop Vásquez issued this follow-up message:

As we continue working together to overcome this pandemic, vaccines are becoming more and more available. I again express gratitude to our health care professionals who have developed these important protections against COVID-19.

Because the Johnson and Johnson vaccine was developed, tested and produced with abortion-derived cell lines, it is only judged acceptable for reception if there is no other vaccine available with less connection to abortion-derived cell lines. Nevertheless, it may be the only option for many people. Thus, for the good to be gained for society, if the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines are present but unavailable for any reason, it is morally acceptable to receive the Johnson and Johnson vaccine and one may take it in good conscience.

¹ *Dignitas Personae*, 35. “Of course, within this general picture there exist *differing degrees of responsibility*. Grave reason may be morally proportionate to justify the use of such “biological material”. Thus, for example, danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available. Moreover, in organizations where cell lines of illicit origin are being utilized, the responsibility of those who make the decision to use them is not the same as that of those who have no voice in such a decision.”