



ARCHBISHOP'S MESSAGE

January 29, 2021

Vaccination: yes or no?

For several weeks now, I have been receiving requests for clarification on the subject of vaccination. I have taken my time to answer these questions because it is a complex reality and it is important, in my position, to offer the faithful of our Diocesan Church statements that are truthful and clear. It is important to note that there is a lot of information circulating in social networks on this subject. Experts in the field of health seem to contradict each other on different aspects of the question. In addition, there are positions based on conspiracies, both political and religious. There is enough material in the media to confuse even the most learned.

My message today does not seek to enter the debate and argue one side or the other. I have, however, taken the time to consult with a few reputable, local Catholic doctors to shed some light on the situation and to help me formulate a directive that might unite us as a Church rather than divide us. I already see too many messages that sow fear and doubt and consequently division and judgment.

All things considered, I feel it is important to trust the messages of our public health authorities here in Canada and in Ontario. The main message is clear and it is based on a multitude of scientific sources using the most current information available.

On the issue of the two vaccines being proposed by public health authorities, they are safe and necessary to control the threat of the coronavirus. Might there be side effects for some? Possibly yes. But the vaccines are deemed efficacious by our authorities who have the expertise to make a judgment. The pandemic is serious and is causing a death rate that has already affected too many of our families and fellow citizens, especially among our vulnerable senior citizens as we have tragically witnessed here in our archdiocese. The entire hospital system is affected; talk to the doctors and nurses who are on the front line every day addressing the crisis. It is necessary for us, as a Church and as a society, to cooperate to reduce the spread of the virus. I thank all those in our parishes who have followed the protocols put in place by the archdiocese. These new procedures have made our churches as safe an environment as we can to provide us the opportunity to practice our faith in this time of crisis; being able to go to Mass is essential.

As for the moral issue of receiving the vaccines, I believe it is important to say something. Vaccines are sometimes developed and/or tested using cell lines derived from either aborted fetal tissue or destroyed human embryos. Knowing this, many ask me if we can in good conscience receive a vaccine developed and produced from this unethical research. This is a serious dilemma.

The short answer to a complex question is that in this particular circumstance, it is morally permissible to be vaccinated. We are in a global pandemic that has caused the deaths of over two million people worldwide and which has left many others with lingering adverse affects. Since we do not have completely licit (morally pure) alternatives at this time, we can receive the vaccines we have available to us in Canada.

To add context to the short answer, I will let the experts shed some light on the subject. I recognize there is a diversity of opinion within our Catholic Church. I refer you, to two resources that summarize the thinking of specialists in moral theology upon which I base my decision:

- Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican)
- Letter by the Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories

In both documents they explain that the current vaccine situation is not ideal and that we must advocate for future vaccines that are derived or tested in a more ethical manner. In our situation, it is morally permissible to be vaccinated and this is not a compromise with regard to our conviction of the sanctity of human life. I encourage you to read one or both of these documents for a more complete answer.

This being said, I will not force anyone to receive the vaccine if they are not willing. However, in the spirit of helping one another to fight this pandemic with a limited number of accessible vaccines, I encourage you to receive the vaccine.

In conclusion, we must not forget the power of prayer and the sacraments. Let us implore God, through the intercession of the saints, to put an end to this pandemic and to give us patience and perseverance in order to stand firm in charity and hope.

Please continue to pray for me, as I do for you.

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