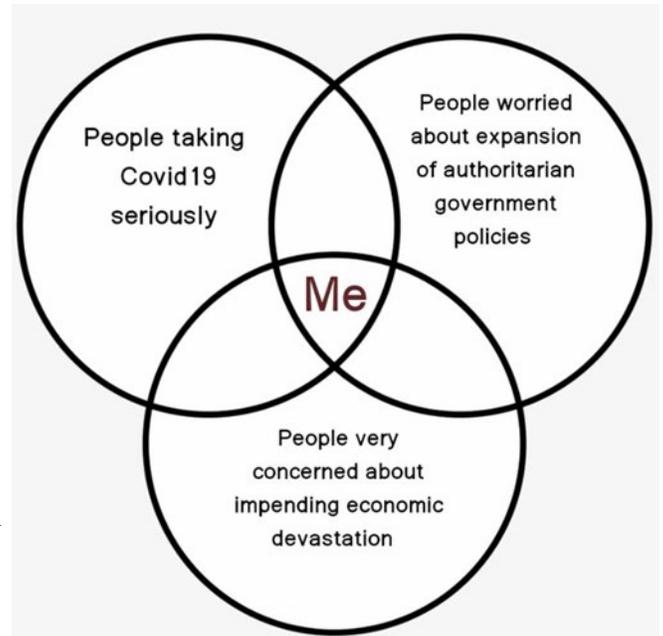


Dear Parishioners,

It has now been five weeks since we have celebrated a public Mass at the Basilica, and we have as a society been under a shelter-in-place order for over three weeks, with no immediate end in sight to resuming normal life. There has been prudent talk of ways to transition out of the current situation, such as the Governor of Tennessee announcing that the stay-at-home order will be lifted and that there is a plan to re-open sectors of the economy. Bishop Stika has been consulting and trying to prudently evaluate when and how we could have public Masses in the future. All of these things are subject to change as the data about this disease becomes clearer. We have a duty to respect and obey the prudential judgments of legitimate authority, as they do their best to protect the common good, as well as give place to good common sense.

I saw a very interesting Venn diagram that accurately described the predicament that most people are in. It's ok to be caught in the middle of these competing ideals and concerns.

Now, if you are like me, you have been wrestling with competing goods. And this is, of course, the source of many a moral dilemma. Just like we sometimes have to choose between the lesser of two evils, so, too, we are presented with two goods that might be mutually exclusive. It is not an easy task to thread the needle, and this is why we are called to respect and obey the prudential judgment of legitimate authority and proceed with caution if we are to question that authority. We should always exercise our right to disagree with respect and due deference to the fact that we ourselves are not responsible or liable, should we choose wrongly. Hindsight is always 20-20, but foresight is not so clear. We may wake up a year from now and look back at this moment and think, "Boy, we massively **overreacted** to this!" But there is also the possibility of us waking up a year from now and saying, "Boy, we really **underestimated** the deadliness of that virus!" The challenge is to balance the goods that we know now - against the evils that we know now - and make the best decision in the moment. Now is not a time to try and "win points" politically or even ecclesiologically.



This dilemma plays out in our life of faith when the protection of the body means that we are not able to access the means of grace for the soul as readily as we might even have a right to. But at the same time, the dictates of our faith and our conscience should acknowledge - and be formed by - the fact that our actions, even well-meaning, pious, and holy, can have a deleterious and detrimental effect on the vulnerable. So, while no one should be denied the sacraments, their public celebration and access to them can be regulated for the sake of the common good. This is not anybody's idea of the way it **should** be. I point you back to the Venn diagram to see how precarious this balancing act is.

Now is the time for us to band together in common action for the common good, even if we feel very strongly one way or the other and have legitimate concerns. The reality is that this is not an ideal situation: You miss being at church. I miss having you at church. Let's pray for a swift end to this epidemic so that we can hopefully reunite soon. I hope this helps you to understand the current crisis. I invite you to offer sincere prayer, for our leaders, both civil and ecclesial, that they might have the wisdom and prudence necessary to lead us through this time of uncertainty.

I will take the opportunity of the lifting of Governor Lee's shelter-in-place order on May 1st to resume Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as we were doing before; that is, from 8am after the morning Mass until 12 pm noon, Monday through Friday. We will also begin offering some regular times for confessions. Stay tuned!

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. J. David Carter, Pastor and Rector