

***We have so much for which to be grateful:*** at this point in time, we have not directly experienced many of the physical problems of the Coronavirus here in eastern Washington—certainly not to the extent that people on the east coast have. I am so grateful that the potential for illness and death has in some ways passed us by. Because we have been spared so much of the potential devastation of the disease, it has given rise to some attitudes that I think are worth reflecting on. The first of which is the idea that this has been just overblown hype, and that there was never any real danger to us to begin with. I think it's easy to believe that because most of us have not seen the suffering or dying with this disease—it remains distant, and therefore it doesn't really exist, or if it exists, it won't affect me. It is a common response, but it creates a false sense of security for us—if it hasn't happened, it won't. It is an attitude that we should be cautious about.

A similar attitude existed during the time of the 1918 flu epidemic as well, and the resurgence of the epidemic was more deadly than the first. Assuredly, we are in much different circumstances than we were in 1918—medicine has made huge advances in the areas of immunology and serology; our quality of life is much higher in many ways—our life expectancy is higher now than in 1918, we have access to much better nutrition and our health in general is significantly different. We do still have additional challenges that are a part of our world: we carry too much additional weight, we live a less active life than people did in 1918, much of our food is loaded with chemicals and preservatives and has been modified by genetic engineering; and because medicine has made so many advances, we are living longer and are managing disease processes with medication. All these things combine to make the population more vulnerable in some ways. It is far too early to determine the extent of the impact the disease will have as so much remains unknown.

In the larger community as well, with the frustrations that come with the social distancing that has been imposed I have seen people disregard all precautions and go about their business with the idea that they will not “get it.” Our social distancing is not about contracting the illness, but is instead about giving it to others if we have been exposed but have no symptoms or only mild symptoms. I have made visits to people in homes, hospitals and health care institutions during these last several weeks, and the precautions that health care professionals have imposed are indications of just how devastating the danger is from the outside to a vulnerable population. The epicenters of outbreaks have been long-term health care facilities, nursing homes and concentrated populations of vulnerable people. Please remember that it is not about contracting the disease, but about passing it on inadvertently and unintentionally to others.

Another prevalent conversation has been along the lines that we are presuming we've already had the Coronavirus and have recovered—that whatever flu, cold or sinus infection we've experienced earlier in the year was the Coronavirus. It gives rise to the attitude that we have already developed immunity and are therefore “safe” to go about things as before. For every person with that thought, I hope it is true that we all have already “had it” and are immune. The problem with that is that there just has not been, and will not be for a long while, sufficient testing to determine that. Until such time, we must continue to remain cautious for the safety of others.

The final attitude that I find challenging at this time, is the politicization of the disease that is disturbing. While I struggle with the political commentaries that circulate, there is one thing which is universal: every politician, every leader needs our prayer to act

with wisdom and concern for the common good. I cannot imagine any person entering into public service without some intention of working for the good of our community, our state or our nation. The results of their efforts are sometimes disappointing, but for whatever reason, they have been elected to positions of leadership. From a faith perspective, our prayers offer support and encouragement, and as we get closer to the feast of Pentecost, we rely on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help them act judiciously, prudently and with care. Coronavirus is a disease, it is a public health concern and policies surrounding it are made to ensure the common good, not for political expediency.

As I write this reflection, I would like to encourage everyone to keep their prayers focused on the care and concern that we must have for one another, to work at keeping others safe, as well as remain positively motivated to overcome the challenges that we face. Much still remains unknown—the degree to which we may develop immunity, the possibilities of resurgence in the fall, the speed with which the disease may mutate and the long-term challenges that we will face in providing health care to those affected. We are not a people who live in fear, we are a people who move forward in confidence that Christ journeys with us. We are a people who remember that the gifts of the Spirit are given to us all in varying degrees and means for our good and the good of others. Easter offers us time to recognize that it is *through* the person of Jesus, *through* His wounds and sacrifice that leads to resurrection and the joy of the Kingdom of God.