



# MAY JESUS CHRIST BE PRAISED!

MAY 17, 2020 / SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

## Spiritual Ponderings:

### Corona Virus & the Sacraments - Part III

I am using an article that I read to guide my reflections on the Church and the Corona Virus. The article is called: "Epidemic Danger and Catholic Sacraments" and was written by a theologian named Thomas Joseph White. I felt God asking me to use this article as a stepping off point for my own reflections on what this strange time of "social distancing" means for the Church. Quotes from his article will be in bold and my commentary and reflections will be in normal font. *Thomas Joseph White, O.P., is director of the Thomistic Institute in Rome.*

**There are many other medieval and early modern examples that could be cited, but much more recently, in 1918, the churches in many parts of the United States closed for public worship during the Spanish Flu. In New Orleans (hardly a Protestant city) the city ordered that churches had to close, which did prompt some outcry from Catholic pastors who said that this had not been done during earlier epidemics. They were in error. Old moral theology manuals classically indicate that one of the reasons a priest can celebrate mass privately without a server is due to plague, which shows that earlier moralists understood that priests might not be able to celebrate publicly during such times. The bottom line is that the Catholic Church generally did whatever was reasonable to prevent the spread of disease and to comply with rational city ordinances. It chafed a little and pushed back against things that seemed unreasonable, but when it needed to suspend gatherings for mass, it did so. By contrast, in 1918 some Christian Scientists in the U.S. refused to close churches based on the premise of their spiritual superiority, and argued that if they were pious enough, the gathering would not be affected by the illness, nor would they transmit it to others. Here nature is replaced by an appeal to permanent miracle, and common sense and natural reason have given way to vain spiritual presumption. This is what good old-fashioned theology calls a heresy.**

Jesus in the temptation stories tells the devil that "it is not good to put the Lord your God to the test." And throughout the Gospels He is always confronted by the Pharisees and Scribes demanding that He perform some sort of miracle. This normally happens right after He had performed an amazing miracle like the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Maybe the miracle that He has performed in these cases is create creatures (human beings) with the capacity to overcome these problems using their reason and intellect. Remember God did not create illness and natural disasters. These happen because sin throws the world into Chaos. Jesus did though conquer sin and death and walks with us even during these hard times.

**Secondly, it is in fact seriously unethical to attribute to the leaders of the Catholic Church the principal intention of selfishly trying to protect themselves from getting sick. (The technical word here is "calumny.") Bishops and priests do have the right to try to avoid getting sick, as a matter of fact, and it is a natural right that cannot be denied to them even if one disagrees with their prudential decisions. More to the point, they also can infect older members of their communities who will be likely to die. (As I write this, two older Dominican priests I know have died from the virus this past week, and dozens of others are struggling with the illness. I wonder how many of my confreres will have to die before critics will concede that it is reasonable for younger priests who live in rectories with them to take serious precautions?) But this set of concerns, while legitimate, is in fact secondary. The primary issue the bishops are concerned with is the protection of others. This virus spreads through social contact, purely and simply. Often those who have it are asymptomatic and can transmit it even when they think they are healthy enough to say**

mass or attend mass. If priests have public masses, and then they visit anyone who is older than 50, or if they visit the sick and then say public masses, they will help spread the illness both indirectly (by gathering people together) and directly (by becoming transmitters). Under these conditions the temporary suspension of public masses is not only reasonable, but strongly morally defensible.

I remember a priest giving a homily saying that “he wished that his wishing would make pizza nonfattening but alas he knew no matter how much he wished traditional pizza would never be nonfattening. I wish this virus was not transmitted the way that it is but it is. I wish that I could say Mass with all of you in the pews but not if it meant that I was responsible for the death of any of you.

**In saying this I am presuming that some essential services can and should be made available to the laity, such as keeping churches open for public prayer or Eucharistic adoration with spatial distancing. Churches should be able to provide confessions in safe circumstances, facilitate anointings, and carry out private marriage ceremonies and baptisms, all under the guidance of due prudence. I'm also presuming that the measures enacted by the bishops are temporary, as clearly, they are intended to be. A worldwide pandemic of this nature is not an ordinary event, and thus leads to many uncertainties in the short and long term. That the Church should suspend public masses temporarily is defensible as the most reasonable course of action given the novel and unpredictable nature of the illness. It is objectively the best course in such circumstances to err on the side of safety in the protection of life. This gives one time to re-evaluate. Once the quarantine reaches some initial degree of success, standards of practice will evolve and there will be questions of how to safely re-engage public sacramental practices while minimizing public risks. This is not bourgeois reasoning. It is prudential public responsibility.**

When I get really frustrated with everything, I remind myself that a month (two months) is really not that long of a time in an institution that has lasted for close to 2,000 years. It is a reminder to me that most of what irritates me is that I do not have control of the future. I don't know when “normal” will be here or even what “normal” will look like. I then remind myself that it is not my job to know. It is my job to remain holy during this time. What I mean by “holy” is to “love everyone as God loves them.” How am I doing that to the best of my ability.



**May 17 2020 → Sixth Sunday of Easter → Lectionary: 55 → Gospel JN 14:15-21**

Jesus said to his disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”

**Spiritual Reflection:** Having a good advocate embolden the early Apostles to even face death for their faith.

Spiritual Questions

1. Have you ever considered how much concern God has for you?
2. Why does God care for you?
3. Do you pray to the Spirit for enlightenment and inspiration?
4. How do you put yourself into the presence of God before you begin praying?
5. Why is it better for the Spirit to come than Jesus to remain?



**Sunday**

## *Thought of the Day*

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. - C. S. Lewis

- Monday** When the whole world is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind. - C. S. Lewis
- Tuesday** You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending. - C. S. Lewis
- Wednesday** Life with God is not immunity from difficulties, but peace in difficulties. - C. S. Lewis
- Thursday** Hardship often prepares an ordinary person for an extraordinary destiny. - C. S. Lewis
- Friday** The fact that our heart yearns for something Earth can't supply is proof that Heaven must be our home. - C. S. Lewis
- Saturday** Once people stop believing in God, the problem is not that they will believe in nothing; rather, the problem is that they will believe anything. - C. S. Lewis

## PRO-LIFE



May 2020

We pray that the Lord, whose word is upright and whose works are trustworthy, may inspire everyone especially leaders of nations to proclaim the sanctity of heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

For those who have gone astray like sheep, especially our love ones, that the shepherd and guardian of their souls, our Lord Jesus Christ, may find them and bring them home. Amen.



## St. Monica Society

*Please join us in praying a special prayer each month for Catholics who have fallen away from their faith.*

## Catholic Prayers

### A PRAYER TO MY LORD

My Lord, I offer you my thoughts: to be fixed on you; My words: to have you for their theme; My actions: to reflect my love for you; My sufferings: to be endured for your greater glory.

I want to do what you ask of me: In the way you ask, For as long as you ask, Because you ask it.

Lord, enlighten my understanding, Strengthen my will, Purify my heart, and make me holy.

Help me to repent of my past sins And to resist temptation in the future. Help me to rise above my human weaknesses And to grow stronger as a Christian. Amen.