



IMMACULATE HEART^{OF}MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR SEPTEMBER 27, 2020

Dear friends in the Lord,

As the world marks over one million deaths to Covid, our nation surpasses the dreadful threshold of more than 200,000, and infection rates begin to rise once again, this is a moment for us all to recommit to doing our part to save lives.

Months of hand-washing, mask-wearing, distance learning and Zoom meetings—not to mention economic hardship—have made us eager for it all to be over. We experience that impatience especially in our spiritual lives, where we yearn for the sacraments and for a return to public worship without restrictions and inconveniences. But we must pray for the gift of patience and the virtue of prudence—and above all for a Christ-like love.

I've been discouraged by the way simple and prudent measures like social distancing and the wearing of face-masks have become politicized in our nation in recent months. As I watched crowds on television angrily clamoring to be “liberated” from these and other public health protocols, I found myself wondering how many of the people in those crowds would identify as Christians. And if they are Christians, or even Catholics, I wonder what they imagine Christ's great commandments mean in the context of a global pandemic: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength—and your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:37-39). Of course Jesus would go on to say that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (Jn 15:13). That's a pretty high bar! But in light of those words, simple expressions of the love of neighbor like social distancing and the wearing of facemasks should be a no-brainer for a follower of Jesus Christ.

I've seen social media posts from otherwise intelligent and caring people actually questioning the reality of the pandemic. Some have asked, “How can hundreds of thousands of people be dying, and yet I don't know a single person who has gotten sick?” If you don't know anyone who has become ill from Covid, I am happy for you, and I pray that you never do. But I do know many people who have suffered, and more than a few who have died. I've been at their bedsides to anoint them, and I've buried them. They were my parishioners over the years; they were healthcare workers who risked their lives as the virus raged; they were priests I loved and respected. When I encounter people who are unwilling to do the smallest things to save vulnerable lives, I'm afraid I take it rather personally.

May it be said of us, when the pandemic is long-past, that we took to heart the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart. Do nothing out of selfishness or vainglory. Rather, humble yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests only, but everyone for those of others” (2:2-4).

Your brother in Christ's word and work,