

## PASTOR'S CORNER

### Plague Journal

*From day to day, as the Spirit moves me, I will share with you certain theological reflections concerning the liturgy and its relation to the times we're in.*

Palm Sunday, April 5: That which is essential is that which is needed to preserve human life. Understandably then businesses which are necessary in order to help sustain life and health are allowed to stay open during the state-wide lockdown. For example, both grocery stores and pharmacies are exempted from Governor Brown's order (and many others as well). What isn't exempt according to the Governor are religious services. As we all heard on the First Week in Lent, our Lord would most assuredly not have agreed with this conclusion. Remember that he told the Adversary: "*Man does not live on bread alone but on every word which flows forth from the mouth of God*". The provision of religious services, for Catholics without question, is critical in order to help meet the spiritual needs of mankind and to strengthen the faith of believers. Without doubt, from a Christian perspective religious services are essential to the entirety of the population of the State of Oregon. I am disappointed that I did not hear Church hierarchs challenge Ms. Brown's erroneous order in this regard. Perhaps I missed it.

Now don't get me wrong, even if the Governor had deemed religious services "essential" under her order, the Archdiocese would still have been responsible for adapting our services to the new reality. How that might look, I do not now know, but I suspect (and hope) that we will be finding out sometime in the month of May.

Many things bother me about the overall response of the Church here, from Pope Francis on down. It's certainly 'nice' to be seen as doing our part, but at what cost? And what underlying presumptions are we perhaps unwittingly buying into? To my knowledge, no American diocese has mounted a Constitutional challenge to these orders. I am unaware of any prelate who has more aggressively attempted to keep his churches open. Whereas I cannot totally disagree with the Archbishop's decision for us, at least in the short run, something else bothers me about it. A blog post to First Things by Douglas Farrow helped me unravel some of my conflicting thoughts. Here it is:

*One might be forgiven for wondering how it is that these churches have acted so promptly and decisively against a rogue virus that attacks the body alone, after having contented themselves for so long with only the most feeble resistance to the far deadlier pestilences of contraception, abortion, and euthanasia—to name three icons of a society that prefers temporal to eternal goods—which attack both body and soul. One might even be forgiven for wondering whether these churches are not so much displaying simple good sense during a plague as revealing what really matters to them ...*

If this is a reflection of our underlying values in the Catholic Church in the United States, then this is greatly disturbing indeed. I don't believe these values are at all representative of the Archbishop in Portland at all, so something else may be at work here (at least in some particular cases).

I think it's the degree to which a comfortable and affluent society has become profoundly risk-averse and it seems that we have all bought right on into this perspective (I know that at first I did). In this frame of mind, many of us have the knee jerk reaction of doing absolutely anything to avoid suffering and death. Governor Cuomo of New York (who I've seen on local TV far more often than our own Governor) made the astonishing comment that each and every human life is so precious that we should remain in lockdown for as long as it takes. This coming from a man who just recently signed a bill in New York allowing abortion up to the time of birth (and sometimes beyond). Affective hubris triumphs over truth!

The truth is that plagues happen and people die. Prudence demands that we sacrifice what we can to blunt its damage, but not in some ridiculous and futile effort to stop and prevent every single death. Such a goal is not attainable. Nor is it at all desirable at the cost of the spiritual wellbeing of the country.

My fellow Christians, as we celebrate the beginning of Holy Week with Palm Sunday, we need to remind ourselves that we have been conformed to Christ's passion and death in order that he may choose to raise us up on the last day. No one needs to volunteer to suffer, but the Christian should be wise enough to know that its complete avoidance is not only impossible in a fallen world, but would also bear a cost far too steep to pay in the event that it was even partially attainable.