

Prudence: a Virtue to Guide Us through Corona, and Life

As we deal with the ongoing struggles due to the Corona Virus, we've all seen remarkable things in the past two months.

On the one hand, we've seen fear. Fear is by no means a bad thing. Some things should be avoided. I think of taking pictures in Glacier National Park a few years ago. A woman told me to come out closer to the rapids she was looking at suggesting the photo would be better there. I looked at a sign that had a man holding up his arms drowning with a line through it, and it said "Danger!" I did not say a word. I looked at her though and, reading the expression on my face, she said "it says 'danger,' it doesn't say 'don't.'" Needless to say I passed on that photo.

I think that with this virus, being new to the world, and seeing how it has impacted so many, there was an understandable reaction that many national and state governments opted to "lock down" and close many businesses and even churches. This, of course, would not magically cure the virus; for people still had to be out and about, and many workers are deemed "essential" (though I'd say every worker is an essential worker), so the virus still spreads. And eventually lock downs must end lest economics collapse as we try to buy time for hospitals to prepare and find more treatments. Additionally what we've also found is that many people get the virus and have no knowledge of it, and tragically nursing homes have been hit the hardest. I've also heard more than one elected official acknowledge that sheltering in place in the home forever until a vaccine is just not sustainable. Indeed this is true too; for it will be some time before a vaccine is available, (if one is found), and we'll likely have to find a way to coexist with Covid, as we do with many other viruses.

So how does one find a path forward? My medical knowledge consists of watching "ER" from 1994 until about 1998, and successfully removing a rubber band in the game "Operation." I'm no expert on Corona (though I have had a Corona beer, with a lime) but here, I'd defer to a wonderful tool we are given by God: prudence. Prudence is the virtue that guides all the others; it's what helps us come to a conclusion and make decisions.

For one, I think we look at our risk factors and listen to our personal physician. Are we at a higher risk for Corona or another disease? Is it safer to try to work from home or stay inside based on our medical history? If one's physician tells us this, we should listen to their counsel.

However for most of us, the time will come when we have to make decisions on our own. This is what I cherish about the United States. Thomas Jefferson, in his wisdom, noted that our rights are natural - they come from God, not a government. In times of crisis, a government must act for the common good. And some regulation such as health codes, fire codes, environmental management, is always needed. But eventually, businesses and churches will reopen, likely before there is a full fledged vaccine.

And this is where it's important to use that virtue. In some guidelines we have been given for when we reopen, there will be a bridge period to Mass as we were more accustomed to it. There will be greater separation, distance between people with pews being blocked off, smaller crowds, etc. The obligation for Sunday Mass also won't be reinstated. So should a person go? Or what about when the restaurant reopens? Or your place of work? Here, prudence helps us make the decision. We look at the data, that which comes from our own physician's advice, but also what we hear from various experts (often sometimes having differing opinions). We pray about what to do, we think about it, and then we act. Sometimes if we ruminate too much, emotion can take over and we can become overly fearful. Other times, emotion can also lead us to act too rashly without thinking of the risk factors, be it living in a world with a new virus or many other things.

Understandably being a new virus our world is dealing with, there can be a lot of emotions with Corona virus, from fear to anger to sadness. These are hard times for us all, but time will march on and so will our world. Ultimately we'll have to think carefully about how we return to our lives outside of the home from church to school and work, and prudence will help us to do that.

One final note too, make sure your voices are heard. Contact elected officials with whats on your mind as they chart paths forward, for it is important to balance precautions with civil liberties too. Abortion shouldn't be deemed essential with public worship deemed non-essential. It's important Americans remember politicians govern, to again borrow from Thomas Jefferson, by the consent of the governed.

It was so great to see many of you last week at our "drive in" Mass on Sunday. Unfortunately we had some audio issues as due to sprinkles and ice pellets (first time I've had Mass with sleet!) the transmitter could not be moved away from the building, so this may have caused some static. We hope to have that fixed this weekend. We'll also keep you up to date on when we can reopen and what our plans will be for that from the archdiocese which already has guidelines in place for reopening that will be temporary until larger public gatherings return.

God's blessings to you!

Fr. Paul