

How should we respond to the coronavirus as Christians and as members of the St. Catherine of Alexandria parish community?

There's a lot of confusion out there in regards to what should or should not be done during this time of pandemic.

The easy answer is "Don't panic." Or as Jesus would have said, "Fear not."

I am reminded of the recent Scripture reading regarding the storm on the Sea of Galilee where the disciples anxiously wake Jesus from his rest, saying "Don't you care that we are drowning?" Jesus gets up rebukes the rain and wind and calms the sea. "Why do you still doubt?" he asks.

God is in control. And for those who believe, God will provide accompaniment, peace of mind and spirit.

Remember that at baptism the Holy Spirit indwelt each one of us. We were called 'Beloved' and given a new home with the Father in heaven. We need only remain vigilant and avoid the temptation to panic, look out for one another (including ourselves by not put ourselves in harm's way and therefore, others in our families and community) and stay informed by listening to our Shepherd and those designees (including health authorities) who have been given authority to care for us, spiritually, emotionally and physically.

Now is the time for deeper reflection and commitment to our Lord. Just as with the season of Lent, let us practice the three tools of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Pray for those who are panicking or living in fear due to isolation. Ask for God's intervention to keep everyone safe and sane. Keep our first responders and their families in mind as they put themselves in harm's way daily. Pray for those who turn to the church in these unsettling days only to find that we are obeying the health department orders to keep the doors locked and communication only by telephone or email.

Fast from over-buying. Hoarding is a sin, in that it deprives others of the basic things they may need to feed themselves and their families or to remain healthy and not become victims or spreaders of the very disease that the panickers (or greedy) are trying to insult themselves from. When we practice fasting from fear or panic, our stress levels will diminish and we can replace it with peacefulness. Practice intentionality. Set up a daily schedule where you read Scripture, pray as a family, giving thanks for your blessings – yes, we still are blessed! And call a neighbor, friend or family member and ask them how they are doing. Offer to pray with them. Help them to realize that we are all in this together.

Give of our time to listen to one another. If we are going to the store, ask if we can pick up something for a neighbor. Practice smiling. Give people a sense of your calmness due to our faith as a Catholic and Christian and encourage them to find peace if they are anxious.

And remember, you belong to a community, St. Catherine of Alexandria (and the greater, world-wide church). You are part of a family of faith, hope and love. Keep in touch with them by internet, telephone, etc. so that you do not become isolated or feel alone. Pray with us and for us. And for one another. The parish staff will do what they can to keep you updated on the situation and provide encouragement and ideas to remain productive at home.

If we don't ignore safe practices and maintain a healthy attitude we will get through this temporary inconvenience and come out of it more kinder and stronger than ever.

If we choose to ignore safe practices or think we are invincible, we become part of the problem and are a danger to those we come into contact with. Not even Jesus tempted his Father by leaping off a mountain top or the Temple roof to see if the angels would prevent him from stubbing his toe... We shouldn't either.

As Christians we are supposed to show our concern not only for one another but for all and that means avoiding gathering together. Use the telephone. E-mail. Skype. Granted it is not the same as human touch, but it is far safer for all involved.

Our God is a God of life. Let us do nothing to hinder or shorten that life, especially the life of the most vulnerable, our seniors, shut ins and those with health issues.

Let our legacy be one worthy of our Christian dignity.

May each of us encounter Jesus anew and rediscover the joy of being called to be his disciple, proclaiming the Good News! by both our words and our actions.

Blessings!

Deacon John