

Ready to be Done

3-10-2021

This Lent has brought a number of grim milestones. We have been in a pandemic for a year; over 500,000 people have died because of COVID-19 in our country; and over 2.5 million have died around the world. It is important to keep in mind that these were our sisters and brothers, parents and grandparents, children and co-workers, neighbors and friends. Many died alone. Over 115 million people (that we know of) have been infected, and countless others have faced financial hardships, eviction and job loss. Communities of color, and the poor, have borne the brunt of the suffering.

We have given up much this past year. Out of concern for the common good and out of love of neighbor, we have had to modify how we celebrate the Mass and other liturgies, how we catechize, and how we support one another in our parishes. It has not been easy. We are tired. We are ready for this pandemic to be over. We ache from COVID fatigue. Sacrificial love is costly. It is tempting to want to just bounce back to what we were doing in 2019, especially as we see others acting as if the COVID-19 virus has magically disappeared. It has not.

The number of reported infections has been dropping. This is good news. However, the variants – changes in the virus over time – are a significant cause for concern. These variants, which are more contagious and seem to cause more severe disease, put us at increased risk for another significant spike in cases, hospitalizations and deaths. Protecting one another, and avoiding overwhelming our healthcare system, remain critical goals. The next 1-2 months (March-April) will be crucial as we watch for a surge of variants, especially if people getting re-infected becomes a growing concern.

But all is not doom and gloom. We have been blessed by several safe and effective vaccines (Moderna, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson), which Catholics can use with a clear conscience and are encouraged to do so for the sake of ourselves and the common good. While the number of persons presently vaccinated is not high enough to warrant changing our current practices, this is sure to change in time. It was encouraging to hear that enough vaccine for adults in this country ought to be *manufactured* by May, but getting the vaccines into arms will be another challenge. It will take time before we can completely relax our safety protocols.

We are watching the situation closely and will ease our restrictions as soon as it is safe to do so, in a manner that keeps us prudently safe and is consistent with what we know about the virus. The vaccines have offered a sense of hope that such a time is getting closer. But we are not there yet. We need to stay the course for now. Letting our guard down too early would risk even greater spread of the virus and prolong the pandemic, which is the last thing we want to do.

Bishop Thomas Zinkula, Diocese of Davenport