

TEN GUIDEPOSTS FOR CHRISTIANS

IN THE TIME OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC INTRODUCTION

In my service as spiritual father, I earnestly desire to offer support and wise counsel in order to help us cope with the stress that comes with living through this pandemic. In my Pastoral Letter Unleash the Gospel I cast what I wanted to say into the form of "Guide Posts," and that has seemed to helpful. So I've decided to use that format here.

- 1. No Time Is Without Its Grace** - Christ's death and rising is a grace that should shape every day of a Christian's life and above all in these days. In this time of trial we are called to seize the grace of showing ourselves, by the power of the Spirit of Christ, to be, like Christ, filled with faith in God's care for us.
- 2. This Is The Lent God Our Father Wants Us to Have** - This second Guide Post is a sort of corollary to n. 1. God in Christ is the Lord of history. He's in charge. His providential plan for our salvation and happiness cannot be defeated. If he has permitted us to have to be for a while without our public celebration of the Holy Eucharist and our usual Lenten devotions, his Spirit offers us other means to prepare ourselves for Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum
- 3. It's Still About Unleashing The Gospel** - Right now all of us, especially us pastors and our co-workers, are focused on responding to the Corona pandemic. Yes, but that doesn't mean that "unleashing the Gospel" has been abandoned. Quite the contrary. We still must be about evangelization. That's always our mission. This is a providential time for us to witness to our sure confidence in Jesus as Lord of history, to manifest to the world that we face this challenge with unshakeable trust that the Lord will sustain us.
- 4. Now Is The Hour Of The Domestic Church** - At Synod 16 the Holy Spirit said clearly that the Christian family, as the "Domestic Church," has to be at the center of the New Evangelization. In these days when our large public gatherings for prayer and catechesis are suspended, the Domestic Church is all the more clearly "ground zero" for our response. Now it falls squarely on families to make their homes places to hear the Word of God, and to offer him praise, especially in acts of Spiritual Communion and entrustment to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- 5. Holiness Works With Science** - We must resist any idea that there's some sort of divorce between our cooperating with public health officials to mitigate the spread of the virus and our complete trust in God's power to protect us. This Guide Post is a variation on the axiom that "Nature builds on Grace." Our whole-hearted cooperation with the civil authorities involve act of Christian virtue: acts of justice in doing our part to protect the common good, acts of charity because our motive is love for God and neighbor.
- 6. We're Called To Accompany Our Neighbors** - I've "cribbed" this "Guide Post" and the one that follows the pastoral wisdom of Pope Francis. Each of us, especially in our families, faces fears about what the future holds for us as the spread of the virus unfolds. But we're not alone in this. Some of us will become seriously ill, and undoubtedly there will be fatalities - along with all the sufferings that follow for those with loved ones who become ill. Many of us face the prospect of economic troubles, the loss of jobs, the collapse of businesses, with all the trials these misfortunes entail. In this time of troubles we must support one another, not only with sympathy but with ready acts of practical kindness, that is, works of mercy.

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7. We're Obligated To Care For Those "On The Peripheries" - As I've said, here, too, I'm echoing a theme dear to the heart of Pope Francis. The pains caused by the pandemic will fall particularly hard on the poor, the elderly and the chronically ill. We Christians have a particular duty to care for them. One simple but much needed work of mercy will be to stay in touch (by phone?) with the elderly who are quarantined. We should be sure that "social distancing" doesn't result in losing "spiritual closeness." Not least should we remember that many of the inconveniences we experience in order to mitigate the spread of the virus are aimed at protecting the vulnerable. With that in mind it should be easier to be at peace with these inconveniences.

8. Read God's Word Through The Lens Of This Time - The Psalmist says, "O that today you would hear his voice" (Ps 95: 7). As you read any passage of Sacred Scripture that is part of your prayer during these days, listen especially for how in his word God is speaking directly to you about how to find the grace he offers in this time. (See n. 1 above). He wants to speak to your heart: to offer his wisdom about what this crisis means, his guidance about how to respond, his assurance that all things work for good for those who love [him]" (Rm 8: 28). He is close; listen for him.

9. Our First "Touchstone" Is Eucharistic Communion - During this time when the public celebration of Holy Mass has to be suspended, we need the graces of the Eucharist more than ever. For these are the graces whereby the Holy Spirit works in our lives that dying to self and living for the Father that is Jesus's Paschal Mystery. These graces can be available to us through Spiritual Communion. Please pray for Spiritual Communion in the fruits of Christ's sacrifice at least every Sunday, if not more often. And gather as a family to pray together for this Communion.

10. Our Second "Touchstone" Is Our Lady's Protection - From the cross Jesus gave us his Mother to be ours. In every age - from the days before Pentecost until today - the Church has been blessed through the Mother of God interceding for us, from her being close to us with her care and protection. Let us renew our commitment to "fly to her protection." I invite you to join with me in praying the "Memorare" every day to commend not only the Church but also our country, indeed the whole world, to the loving care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And, I follow the admonitions of Bl. Solanus, "thanking God ahead of time" for the graces he will give us in answer to her prayers, and I will work to build a Lourdes Grotto on the grounds of our Cathedral as a token of appreciation for what I am sure he will do for us through her intercession.

CONCLUSION "Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus" (Heb 12:1)

Keep focused on Jesus' example of abandonment into the hands of God the Father.

Keep close to Jesus in prayer.

Keep confident that Jesus is with us in this time of trial.

Keep at peace, for Jesus is Lord, conqueror of sin and death, victor over every evil.