



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

My dear friends,

This year has been a difficult year to find out the truth. It seems that we are deluged with information from sources that pretend to provide information, but really have an agenda. If you are skeptical of what you hear from "news" outlets, that might be the best thing to come from the year of Our Lord 2020.

After ten months of closing our country because of a virus, there will soon be a vaccine available. Actually there may be several vaccines available. You will be faced with moral choices, and many different information services will be trying to win your attention with exaggerated stories.

The Church is entrusted with providing us with the revealed truths of our faith, from God's revelation to his Chosen People, and his revelations through Jesus Christ. Does the Church have any guidance for us on the issues of vaccines?

The most important teaching of the Church on moral questions was formalized in the Second Vatican Council: each of us is made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore, each of us has a conscience. The ecumenical council says this, "In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor."

God gave us each a free will, and a conscience for which we must answer at our judgment. He also gave us knowledge and judgment so that we can inform our conscience. As St. Paul says, our conscience is the law of God written in our hearts, and our conscience will accuse us or perhaps excuse us when "God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." With the great dignity of our conscience, God gave us the responsibility to be well informed and to pass sober judgment on the most reliable knowledge that we can find. What an honor!

At this point in history, it is difficult for anyone to say that vaccines are wrong. During my lifetime, small pox was eradicated from the earth. Polio, which terrorized the United States during the twentieth century, was eradicated from the Americas in 1994. Rubella caused tens of thousands of heart breaking birth defects and stillbirths in the United States when I was young, and was nearly eradicated from our country by vaccinations, but it could return from other countries.

Nevertheless, there may be good reasons for an individual to decline a vaccination because of individual circumstances, or because of the particular vaccine. There may be good reasons for someone to get a vaccine as soon as possible, while someone else should wait for a while.

As your shepherd, and as a friend, I ask everyone to be well informed about the Covid vaccines, and form a sober judgment with good advice from trusted medical experts. Please avoid reading or listening to inflammatory presentations.

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC

In his day, St. Paul was faced with moral extremists who tried to undo his teaching, and he had this to say, "I wish those who unsettle you would neuter themselves." Then he goes on to say, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

During this pandemic, may we use these hardships to grow in our spiritual life, by praying for those who died and for their families left behind, by praying for the medical workers, by praying for our leaders, by generosity to those around us, and by practicing the Christian virtues of forbearance and forgiveness. I commend you all to the prayers of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, and especially to the care of the all holy Mother of God.

Your servant,

+ Kurt

+ Bishop Kurt Burnette

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