

March 24, 2020

Hello Brothers and Sisters,

Sharon and I express our love for you all and, even as people of reclusive tendencies, we miss you and pray for your comfort and well-being in this strange moment. At this time we should remember that the world has experienced worse plagues than Covid 19. But this is not to minimize the threat to health, life, and material well-being that it presents. It has disrupted our lives in a way that none of us has experienced. While projections into the future sometimes suggest that this will be short-lived and we can soon return to normal, other projections suggest a much longer-term possibility with increasingly detrimental effects to the economy. We must hope and pray for the best while preparing for the worst.

Isolation is our primary response. Unfortunately, isolation can contribute to magnified distress. Hence, the situation calls for new and creative ways of communicating with one another. The podcasts for worship represent one of those ways of comforting and encouraging one another. Personal calls and text messages are another, an action that we can all participate in. I am using the printed word in an attempt to contribute to the same cause.

This kind of messaging could have a variety of objectives. There is information overload today, some of it conflicting. Some information is purposely designed to scare and disturb; some is intended to encourage and give hope. Therefore, we might do well to put some of this information into a useful form. Another goal would be to transform our circumstances so that 1) we can see clearly that the true church is not a building, 2) we can take the opportunity to test our faith, as it were, “by fire (1Pet. 1:7),” 3) we can come to appreciate more fully the daily blessing it is to be able to assemble freely and have actual physical contact (a simple handshake or a hug) without threat of harm to the contacting parties, 4) we can reach out to find the most critical needs in the body rather than waiting for them to come to us or remain unidentified, and 5), maybe the most important, we can recognize through experience the frailty of human life and the complete reliance we must place on God to guide us through a broken world and give us hope to escape from it one day into eternal bliss and comfort.

I want to focus on two things today. First, the isolation we are pursuing is for good reason. Our government leaders are trying to avert the situation that exists in Italy. It has been said that Italy’s greatest strength is family. Italy’s strength is the thing that made it most vulnerable. Our great strength, I think, is the familial bond in the body, which would make us also exceptionally vulnerable. As of this morning Italy has a population of 60 million with 64,000 identified cases of the virus and 6,100 deaths producing a death rate of 9.5%. If we had the same experience with a population of 330 million, we would have 33,500 deaths. The typical influenza has a death rate of around .1%. Compared to Italy’s 9.5% we can see how virulent this virus can be. Today we have 46,000 cases reported with 588 deaths which calculates to a 1.25% death rate. While this makes Covid 19 perhaps 10 – 12 times more virulent than Influenza, it is not anywhere near the 95 times in Italy. I give this information simply to reinforce the wisdom of avoiding contact as much as possible. We must suffer the isolation for a while. If we suffer a little now, by God’s grace we may be able to avoid greater suffering later.

As we move forward day by day, even hour by hour, it is uncertain what the extent of the tragedy will be. It could be minimized and short-lived. Or, particularly if the directives are ignored, it could be much worse. As each day and each hour passes, the impact increases and the potential for even greater woes looms real. This can cause measurable concern, worry, and even depression, all intensified by isolation. Perhaps the situation is made still worse because there is little that we can do individually in a pro-active or physical. But, we are not without recourse. There is much we can do in a spiritual sense.

We can pray and pray diligently. If indeed you believe in the power of prayer as Dell Tackett expressed it, "You believe what you believe is really real," this is a great time for intensive prayer. Pray that the spread of the virus will be minimal, pray for those treating the infected, pray for finding cures and treatments of the disease, pray for the guidance of our leaders, pray that those who would use the situation for monetary or political gain be confounded in their efforts, pray for a short-lived event that will not produce large scale economic harm, pray that we will grow spiritually, pray that we will be more appreciative of the good times when they return, pray that we be more thoughtful of others and less of ourselves, pray that we will see more clearly the folly of this world, pray that we might find a greater hope in Christ, pray that we might better appreciate the Lord God, our Creator, pray. Pray not casually once. Pray not casually once a day. Pray with heart, pray with understanding, pray with expectation, pray with a purpose, pray with compassion. Pray that the Lord will see the blood of Christ on the lintels and doorposts our hearts and let this scourge pass over us. And pray that He will help us to be more appreciative of Him and submissive to His will and nature.

God bless you all.