

Advent

Advent is a time of looking forward. As we begin the new liturgical year (the year of S. Mark) we look back to 2020 and I must say that it has been a year like no other, a year that I would not want to see the like of ever, ever again! However, look forward we must, and as well as the usual themes and hopes of Advent this year, we have the prospect of life returning to something like normal by the Spring.

Advent is a time of preparation, a time to make all things new as we await the coming of the king to his manger throne at Christmas, to the throne of our hearts as he comes in Holy Communion and as he comes enthroned on the Cherubim as judge and king eternal. On that journey we will be accompanied by the great personalities of Advent – the prophets, those who foretold the word of God, each in their own generation, the Baptist who came to make all things ready for the coming of the Messiah, and Our Lady who bore Christ in her Immaculate Heart before she ever conceived him in her virginal womb.

The Christmas that we will celebrate will be like no other that any of us have known. When we celebrate the mystery of the Word made flesh and kneel before God who did not distance himself from us, we will be physically distanced from one and another and yet united in our homage of him and with the bonds of communion no less real.

Covid-19 Vaccine

Amid the song of the angels we can also take heart that the coming of Spring should bring long-awaited good news. We can now hope that the long shadow cast by Covid-19 will recede. Not one but three vaccines have been proven to be effective and should be available very soon. Two vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna pose no moral and ethical questions for Catholics. The third, the so-called Oxford vaccine, has used cells cloned from the kidney of an aborted foetus in 1973.

As Catholics we are entitled to ask ourselves if this causes problems of conscience. Does it at the very least place us in proximity to, and in direct co-operation with, the original termination of a pregnancy?

This is a complex question, but the simple answer is, yes we are. We might accept the grave sinfulness of the original termination, and not wish in any way to be associated with it, but because the vaccine's production depends by its nature on cells derived from the original termination, we do, very remotely and unwillingly it is true, cooperate with the original act. However, and this is very important, if there are no alternatives, then Catholics can in good conscience receive this vaccine. Although two other vaccines are available, it is highly likely that we will not be given the choice as to which we have. The Oxford vaccine is a fraction of the cost of the other two, and 100,000,000 doses have been ordered, so it is reasonable to assume that this is the vaccine most of us will be offered.

When the Vatican was asked about this in connection with the Rubella vaccine in 2005, the response was: "vaccines with moral problems pertaining to them may be used on a temporary basis". (*Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses*, 2005)

So, while this vaccine is indeed problematic from an ethical point of view, Catholics can receive it, especially considering that not to do so could present a danger to the population as a whole. This does not, however, lift the obligation on all Catholics to do whatever is in their power to challenge politicians and scientists on these very important issues.

Christmas Celebrations

Congregational worship subject to Covid-19 regulations will resume from this Wednesday. Therefore we urgently need to make plans for our parish celebrations. Although livestreaming of Mass will continue, all Masses, from Wednesday, will be open to members of the public.

Looking forward to Christmas itself, it will not be feasible or practical to have our usual grand Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. At the time of writing I have no idea how many people will want to come to Mass. Last year Midnight Mass was very well attended. This year we are restricted to a maximum of sixty people at any Mass. Therefore in light of this, Mass will be celebrated at the following times:

Christmas Eve:
6pm Vigil Mass
8pm Solemn Mass of Christmas Night

Christmas Day
8am Low Mass
10 Solemn Mass

Could I please ask you to be understanding in these difficult times. It is possible that you may arrive at one Mass only to find that we are at maximum capacity. We do not want to disappoint anyone but we have to abide by the rules. Should this happen to you please do accept my apologies and return at one of the other Masses. I would ask you also to attend only one of the four Christmas Masses.