

Comments by the Archbishop regarding new restrictions on religious worship

Excerpted from a homily for Christ the King Sunday

22 November 2020

I had hoped, sincerely hoped, that we would not all be tried once again in body and spirit by such a severe second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. The restrictions placed on banning congregations, even limited ones, from attending Holy Mass are, of course, a matter of grave concern to us both as Catholics and as citizens of British Columbia.

The faithful of the Archdiocese have been exemplary in respecting the health orders of the provincial government because they care for the well-being of their neighbour, especially the most vulnerable among us. It must be recognized that we are making a great sacrifice and observing a Eucharistic fast which, I pray, will bring us the Lord's blessings. Certainly we must pray that the situation will soon change, so that we can return to Mass with a congregation, even if reduced in number.

It is important to point out to the authorities, who are struggling valiantly in so many ways to maintain public health, as is their mandate, that for the past six months we have kept our churches open for Mass, all the while scrupulously observing all the precautions put in place. In fact, not one of 78 parishes has been the location of a community outbreak of

the virus. No evidence has been forthcoming to help us understand why worship in Catholic churches must be curtailed from its current status so as not to put a strain on our health-care system, a system that certainly needs to be protected for the common good.

In light of this record within the Archdiocese, it is puzzling, to say the least, to comprehend why our facilities can be used – and we are delighted that they are – for meetings such as AA in the basement, while not even limited worship can take place upstairs in the church. As I mentioned in the letter written last Thursday: “From today’s order it seems that religious institutions are not being treated with the same consideration regarding the number present at religious gatherings compared to that at secular indoor gatherings.”

The reason why gathering for worship in limited numbers where all safety precautions are met is *not* allowed, while bars and restaurants and gyms can remain open with measures that are no more safe, is simply baffling. That is why the new provincial health order is hard to understand, and why I hope that a further explanation from the provincial government – now that there has been time for further reflection – will be forthcoming.

To limit the religious freedom of believers to worship is a very serious matter, since such freedom is specifically protected in Canada’s



Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We all want to protect the health of British Columbians, but that burden should not – *must* not – fall unjustifiably or unequally on communities of faith.

Our Catholic churches, of course, will remain open for prayer, adoration and individual Confession. Even without a congregation present, Mass will be offered daily for the faithful. The Church can *not* and does *not* stop – the theme we coined in the early days of the pandemic. The Psalm proposed for today’s Mass is the well-known and comforting one that in times such as these we do well to bear in mind: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. . . . Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me” (Ps 23:1.4).

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