

The pandemic has caused many to focus on what matters most: God



A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, a respected analyst of popular opinion, recently discovered that a quarter of Americans who identify themselves as religious say that the COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened their faith, while only 2% say that their faith has been weakened. This is not unlike reactions when other catastrophes have come upon this society, such as war or natural disaster.

Anecdotally, churches across the country, including Catholic churches, have noted a quite gratifying response to their efforts to present worship services electronically, online, on television or the like.

It is not surprising, but, in a way, it is unfortunate. It is too bad that people must confront the unknown or disaster face to face before they realize that they are not almighty. Any intelligent person certainly has learned that lesson at this time. With all our wealth, power and knowledge, not one human being so far has learned how quickly and easily to restore someone infected with the coronavirus to health or to rid a community totally and absolutely of its threat.

Churches are reopening across the United States – and around the world, for that matter. It will be interesting to see if the pandemic will reverse, or affect in any way, the downward slide in terms of church-going that has been a pattern for a while. Perhaps connections with institutional churches, and religion itself, will revive. This was the case after the Second World War, another time of great anxiety, ended. For example, among Catholics, vocations to the priesthood and

religious life surged.

Even when the pandemic is controlled, the experience of the first quarter of 2020 hopefully will remind everyone of the need for, and mercy of, God.

In the meantime, likely Catholics will have to adjust. Many changes will come in the liturgy. Already, some dioceses have announced new policies for liturgy. Rules for Eucharistic ministers may be issued. Some rules will not be utterly new. Already, many parishes require ministers of the Eucharist to sterilize their hands before distributing holy Communion. The ancient "kiss of peace" may be modified to avoid physical contact. Receiving Communion from the chalice may be curtailed, and reception of Communion on the tongue might be modified. Actually, even before the pandemic, under the rules governing the liturgy, both practices in receiving the Eucharist were optional. No one had to receive the precious blood. Any Catholic could choose for herself or himself whether to receive holy Communion on the tongue or in the hand.

The fundamental point after all is considered is that all need God, and the Eucharist brings us to God, and God to us. We receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ, completely, if we receive holy Communion only under the appearance of bread. Receiving the host on the tongue is neither more fitting nor more respectful than receiving Communion in the hand.

This is inevitable. Churches, as all institutions or individuals, will stress sanitation. No scientist anywhere has suggested that this virus suddenly will disappear forever. No one argues that the disease is not a danger.

God created our bodies. We must protect them from injury. We must use all reasonable precautions to offset illness.

Another unknown in terms of life in the Church will be

economic. Parishes across the United States report a considerable loss of income. In all too many cases, it is not because anyone is stingy, but rather so many people are facing economic stress. Pastors know this. No one should feel guilty if personal circumstances reduce or end altogether giving to the Church. Not all are facing tight budgets, however, and Catholics with financial security in these days have an increased obligation to aid Church efforts to serve, to evangelize and to help the needy.

The pandemic has led many to see what is most important. Coming days may call for thinking further about what is important.

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