

I have an email here, which Bishop Konzen sent out yesterday to all the parishes dealing with some of the current health issues. I'll just read two pieces of it for you:

“Dear Friends in Christ,

Given the ongoing concern over the coronavirus, we have decided to suspend distribution of the Precious Blood for the time being. We feel we would eventually have to take this action, and hope that taking it early will allay any fears people have now and demonstrate our concern for the health and safety of our congregations.”

Well, actually you might have noticed that for the last three weeks, we have not been distributing the Precious Blood, but it was not because of the health issues. It was because we didn't have enough Extraordinary Ministers. As soon as this coronavirus stuff disappears, I'm going to be up here again begging you to start becoming Extraordinary Ministers. And there is, by the way, a training session on Tuesday, because we still distribute the hosts, so I need more people to volunteer.

Now, Bishop Konzen continues:

“Individual pastors can decide whether or not to suspend the exchange of peace.”

Many pastors have already taken those precautions to prevent the spread of flu in their communities, which of course is obviously a much bigger kind of issue at least for us for right now.

Now, at the Mass, the Deacon will say, “Let us offer each other the sign of peace.” And we tend to take that as shaking hands, but that's only one way. You can smile. You can nod at somebody. You can bow to them. You can do full Asian bow. You can do all kinds of things. The one thing that I ask that you not do, is if somebody comes up and puts their hand out to you, you don't go *GASP*! Because that's going to happen. People out of force of habit are going to do that kind of thing, so we just sort of try to get along with one another on these things.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, and the first Sunday of Lent every year always has the Gospel readings about the temptations of Jesus. Jesus felt it necessary, and as a consequence the Church has this period we call Lent. He felt it necessary at the beginning of His public ministry, to go out into the desert and spend a period of forty days actually, in prayer and fasting and communion with His Heavenly Father. It was to be a way of giving us an example, but also of closening, if you can use that term about two members, two persons of the Trinity, His relationship with the Heavenly Father. And Lent is supposed to be that kind of time for us, when we spend a period of time, some of our energy, trying to get a closer connectedness with our Heavenly Father. And of course people tend to observe it, many times by giving stuff up, many times by all sorts of, sometime fairly difficult undertakings. But often enough, I think there's an issue about what some of the basics maybe should be.

I was looking through a survey, a study actually; it was more than just a survey, but a study that was done not too long ago by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown

University in Washington, D.C. And the issue they were studying is the fact that people, so many - about 20% of people in the teen and millennial age groups use the term “disaffiliated with” which actually means “dropped out” of the Church. Now, they were focusing on Catholics, but it’s a phenomenon that’s across the board in all religions. And the thing that they found, interestingly enough, was that the process of disaffiliation begins on average at the age of 13. Now, I would argue that there’s very few 13 year olds who are mature enough, developed enough, or knowledgeable enough to be able to make that kind of decision. So I would say that their parents are mixed in there somehow, someway. But the other interesting piece about this is that in the vast, vast, vast majority of cases of these people, these 20% who disaffiliate - well, let’s call it what it is, who drop out of the Church - the common background is they didn’t go to a Catholic school, they didn’t attend Sunday school, and they rarely, if ever, went to Mass. Now, I would also say that if you have a 13 year old who rarely, if ever, goes to Mass, they’re not driving themselves. They’re not going to Mass, but their parents are acquiescing in that immature decision. And the comparable piece that goes along with it is that for most of the parents the same criteria applied. The majority of them didn’t go to Mass with any measure of regularity.

Now, you sit back and take a look at that picture, which is just basically a sketch of the study, but take a look at that picture, and what’s common in that picture is that the people, especially the parents, have not done the basics. They haven’t gone to Mass with a regularity. They haven’t really been involved in activities in the Church – evangelical, the Gospel, kind of activities. For example, St. Vincent de Paul – working with them, the homeless shelters, visiting the sick, whatever it might be. All of those kinds of things. They didn’t do the basics, and as a consequence everything else then kind of goes by the wayside.

Now the same, I think, has to apply to our observance of Lent. I mean, we can give up drinking for Lent. I’ve told you before about the priest over at St. Jude’s when I was in residence there who religiously gave up smoking for Lent every year, and he was like a bear with a sore head the entire season, so we were the ones doing the penance. But the bottom line is if we do something like that, but we’re not going to Mass, then it’s all for nothing. And close to 50% of Catholics in the United States today believe you’re ok as long as you go to Mass twice a month. Well, you’re not. The Commandment of the Church says you go to Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. So if you’re going less than four times a month, well, actually five some months, you’re not doing what the Church says we’re supposed to be doing. We’re not doing the very thing that will most completely solidify our relationship with our Heavenly Father. The Second Vatican Council said that the Mass is the summit and the source of all Christian living. So without the Mass, we don’t have the power or the energy or the spiritual drive in order to be able to maintain that relationship with our Heavenly Father. And Lent is a waste of time if we’re not doing the basics. Now the basics can be found in the Ten Commandments and in the Commandments of the Church. And in case you haven’t ever heard of the Commandments of the Church, we have them. They’re in the Catechism. But you don’t have to root through 450 pages of Catechism in order to find them. You can go on the web. Type in Commandments of the Catholic Church, and there you go - all six will pop up.

So what I’m going to do is ask you this weekend, well, I’ll give you ‘til tomorrow since the weekend is almost over, it’s 5 minutes to six. I’ll give you tomorrow. Take ten minutes to look through the basics: The Ten Commandments, and all their details, and the Commandments of the

Church, and their details. And ask yourself how much of that am I doing routinely. And for example, if I'm going to Mass every Sunday, well, if I'm going to Mass twice a month, time to start going every Sunday – four Sundays a month, except for the four months that have five Sundays, and on those months, five Sunday a month. If you are going on four Sundays a month, add one or two days a week. You cannot over exaggerate the amount of power the Mass has in developing our relationship with the Heavenly Father. So ask yourself, what of those basics you're not doing, because none of us do them all perfectly, but we can all do better. And then for Lent, whatever else it is you do, do the basics. Without the basics, nothing else is going to do us a great deal of good, it will not effectively deepen our relationship with the Heavenly Father.