

## **Keeping resolutely prayerful and focused on God's help in this season of a global pandemic**

Human history records many seasons of frightening occurrences beyond our ordinary control.

What is most frightening is that such occurrences, whether due to natural catastrophes like major storms or the outbreak of this Covid-19, give birth to instant, self-invented prophets foretelling and forthtelling impending and frightening doom or judgement.

It is in times like these when pastoral leadership, on behalf of God and the church, must provide sound leadership, comfort and give courage to people of God. Giving such leadership must help the community to understand what is happening and how to keep resolutely prayerful and focused on God, the healing source.

Without that resolute focus we risk suffering from the poverty of faith knowledge, which is the worst kind of poverty.

Poverty of faith and knowledge is a dangerous emptiness in prevalent religious heretics and fundamentalist deception. When that heresy and fundamentalism finds fertile ground inhuman vulnerability such as at the outbreak of a coronavirus, many are lost in the radar of life's meaninglessness.

The Powerful word of God warns us, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me... I will also forget your children" (Hosea 4:6).

Church leadership therefore, by divine appointment, exists to present the gracious and loving omnipotent and omniscient God who sees the past, the present and future. He is God before and beyond human catastrophes. He is the providence and the restorative *Way* of life.

In times like these God's love remains our refuge and deliverer from all the snares of the fowl and deadly pestilence. He covers us under His wings.

He is our faithful healer. Psalm 91; 6 declares that you will not fear the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by the day, or the plague that destroys at midday.

The Presidential Decree at the outbreak of Covid-19, has suddenly given credence to a prophetic narrative of self-condemnation and imminent judgement.

Our reaction to this outbreak has sometimes resulted in frightening fear that shakes people's faith to the core. It is understandable that Christians are emotionally shaken by the fact that churches are not allowed to celebrate services in what should be sanctuaries against evil.

But God has divinely reincarnated family bonds, in-depth prayers and trust for His grace beyond the present challenge.

Coronavirus is a disease which has nothing to do with how many sins we have committed, or how many days left before the final judgement. It is a disease that will pass.

What is important is that we all follow the advice and instructions of the government and medical fraternity: stay indoors, wash your hands regularly, maintain social distance and obey quarantine rules.

To put the outbreak into perspective, it is useful to see that there have been many such outbreaks in human history. For example;

- Antonine Plague 165-180
- Japanese Smallpox Epidemic 735-737

- Black Death or Bubonic Plague 1347-1351
- The Smallpox plague of 1521
- The Great Plague of 1600
- Cholera Outbreak: 1871-1923
- Third Plague: 1855
- Yellow Fever towards end of 1800
- Sixth Cholera Pandemic (1910 – 1911)
- H1N1 virus: 1918
- Asian Flu: 1956 - 1958
- H3N2 (Hong Kong flu): 1968
- HIV/AIDS: ongoing

We must indicate though that although not every outbreak reaches the “pandemic” level of the Covid-19 virus. Covid-19 is potentially the deadliest disease of our times.

Pastoral leadership, as St Paul teaches (Ephesians 4;11), must give sound theological doctrine to God’s people, diffusing and helping to deconstruct shallow and abusive interpretation of Holy Scriptures to invoke unnecessary myths.

Whether we are called to be apostles, bishops, evangelists, pastors or teachers, we must always keep in mind that the word of God is calling us as leaders to harness and prepare God’s people for love and works of service for the better life of humanity and His creation in all seasons.

To this cause, we must be united in faith and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fulness of Christ our Lord.

Our maturity must also help to curb carelessness that seeks to invoke Caesarean scriptural references such as Acts 5; 29 and Mark 12;17.

The Presidential Decree of Lockdown (April 26-April 16) was a consultative process to save human lives.

This does not imply the state is in bed with the Church. The Church, notwithstanding Romans 13, remains obedient and resolute in her prophetic call to rebuke acts of injustice, as done during the cruel and criminal apartheid laws, corruption, lack of service delivery, neglect of the hungry and the poor, etc. without fear or favour.

Notwithstanding deaths, economic destruction, job losses, hunger and increase in the number of destitute families, we must keep resolutely prayerful and focused on the help of God, who knows us and all our challenges, including the globally devastating Covid-19 epidemic.

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