



WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP? DISCERNMENT IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS

BY LINDA CHIUPKA, SYNOD IMPLEMENTATION COORDINATOR

How quickly our world has changed. Where a short time ago we were all engaged in the usual activities of life – work, commuting, attending school, shopping, visiting family or vacationing – many of us now find ourselves confined to close quarters. News of the number and location of new cases, and the impact COVID-19 is having on people and the economy, can lead to feelings of helplessness or uselessness. Our strong desire to come together in our grief and disbelief is frustrated by the necessity of social distancing. Just as one becomes thirsty the moment the water is turned off, our longing for community is strongest when we are told that connecting with others is no longer advisable.

As Christians, we should take comfort in knowing that we remain a single Body, united by Christ, regardless of our proximity to one another. We should be confident that Christ desires to continue to use all who are willing in accordance to our gifts and current situation. For some, this means continuing to serve as public administrators, manufacturers, suppliers, and grocery or sanitation workers. In these cases, our new reality has led to a greater awareness of the dignity of all work and the honour we pay God when we perform our duties to the best of our ability. Others, whose work has been disrupted, may feel called to serve in new ways for a period of time. The desire to serve is a response to the Holy Spirit who calls us out of ourselves. While there are many things we could do, determining the best alternative requires that we engage in the process of discernment.

Discernment begins when the awareness of a need, or conviction, comes to mind. Having had a thought, we can either discard it or contemplate how we might respond. If we choose to entertain the thought, we might ask ourselves the following questions:

1) What is it that I think I can, or should, do?

Here we may have one or more ideas. If we have more than one, each should be considered separately as we go through the remaining questions.

2) Is the activity I am considering a 'good' thing?

This question is trickier than it looks and so requires some real thought. When news of the coronavirus first broke, the first idea that emerged for most people was, "I should stock up on groceries before the shelves are cleared." Is this a 'good' or 'bad' thought?

While it is wise to have two or three weeks' worth of supplies in reserve, our 'good' act can quickly become sinful when fear leads us to overspend in a way that contributes to the scarcity of resources. At such times we may rationalize our decision by saying, "It is good for me to have an abundance so that I have some to share if others come to me in need." If we were to be honest with ourselves, we would admit that it would be even better to leave the excess items on the shelf, since the 'others' we envision cannot possibly know whose larder is full. Items left on the store shelves ensure each of us has easy access where and when they are needed.

3) Is this something I am able to do?

Here we should consider not only our physical ability, but whether or not we:

- Are currently showing symptoms of COVID-19;
- have recently returned from international travel;
- have been in close proximity to someone that has tested positive;
- would be taxing the immune system of an already at-risk person or population;
- are suggesting an activity that would contravene new or existing laws or recommendations, including those of the Church.

4) Is this something that I am well suited for?

There are many places where we are seeing great need. Certainly those engaged in the health care industry are under great stress. Not only are the longer shifts taxing their physical health, but school and day care closures are negatively impacting their ability to access child care. Although we might feel called to help with either aspect, we should consider the appropriateness of our offer. If we do not have the necessary skills, experience, temperament or support, we are not likely correctly discerning what the Holy Spirit has in mind for us. If, however, these things are in place, we may be identifying an area in which we are being called to serve.

5) Is this something I want to do?

God respects our free will. Each of us has to consider our own situation, which includes taking care of ourselves and the members of our own household. If considering a possibility does not bring a sense of peace, it is likely not something God is asking of us.

As we move through the next few weeks, we would be wise to remain attentive to thoughts that may be invitations to serve. Some of these thoughts may be spontaneous, some may come while watching the news, while others may be prompted by the words of a family member or friend. As we discern each thought, we should be confident that God has already equipped us for our assigned task. Whether we choose to offer prayers, engage in fasting, join with family members in a board game, organize a food drive or telephone someone we know to be isolated, our actions that emerge out of love are the very ways we help to build up the Kingdom of God.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” James 1:5.

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