

August 30, 2020

Dear Friends,

As I write this column I am at the Jersey seashore for some vacation time. There are a lot of people here. Not as many as over the Fourth of July but still many people. My older brother Michael and his wife Marie and I went to dinner last evening after I got down from Sunday Masses. We went to a local place nearby and sat outside under large umbrellas and with proper social distance between tables. The wait staff was all masked. Those who came to eat out were all masked until they sat down at table. When the meal was finished people donned their masks once again and headed to their cars or walked home.

This worked very well but I was thinking what changes would have to happen when the weather began to get colder. People won't sit out in the cold. They don't want to be uncomfortable in such circumstances. I know that in Philadelphia the restaurants will be allowed to serve meals inside their establishments beginning next week. I was personally happy to be able to go out for dinner with my family and not have to prepare and cleanup afterwards. I do not think I am alone in this. But people are in very different places. In speaking recently to a number of parishioners it is clear to me how many people are living with another person who may have health issues. Others are taking care of parents or older relatives. Some are tending grandchildren. All said the same thing to me. I do not want to do something that could end up with me being compromised, catching Covid-19 and then putting someone I love at risk.

Those who can go out are beginning to go out but for many that is just not presently an option. And that includes going to Mass. Yes, Archbishop Perez has issued a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass. That may well be in place for the foreseeable future. But my own thinking is that if I can go out, and not put myself at risk, or put another at risk, then I am probably going to go out—to dinner or to see a movie or to go shopping or have a picnic and so forth.

There is a concern though. March, April, May, June July, August. Six months. You do something for six months it changes you. You carry fear in your hearts for six months that has a debilitating effect on you. Each of us has to find a way to push back against some of the negativity and against the detrimental impact covid-19 is having. We have to help each other by frequent encouragement and invitations to go out in ways that do not put us at risk. Even taking a walk is helpful and gets the heart pumping and the blood flowing and gets us out of the house and breathing in some fresh air. We have to search for reasons to remain hopeful despite the drumbeat of negativity that inundates us from the screens in our homes. My friends, this is a time for us to turn to the Lord for his help and his assistance. We must pray for each other but we must also pray for those negatively impacted by the coronavirus and we must pray for our country so that we will not be overwhelmed by the daunting political situation facing us presently. Our Lord is with us. He will not abandon us but we must turn to him, go to him, ask him for all that we need, pray for those afflicted with this virus. Let us resolve to remain faithful. There is no better way.

In the Peace of Christ,
Msgr. McHenry