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A Class of 2020 Graduating Student's Reflection on COVID-19

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Explanation

The follow work is a general recounting and reflection up to my current experiences regarding the COVID–19 Pandemic. I was prompted to write this thanks to my History 138 class, “Francis: The Making of a Saint,” taught by Doctor Marita von Weissenberg. Throughout the course of this pandemic, I had considering uploading a journal entry, reflection, or some other information to the Xavier Library’s COVID-19 exhibit. However, I had been unaware of all that was involved, and I honestly was just too naturally timid to actually attempt submitting anything. Thankfully, Doctor von Weissenberg’s course helped provide just the opportunity I needed. Without further ado, I hope that you – yes, you, reading this document in the future, enjoy this reading.

A. M. D. G.

A Reflection on the COVID-19 Pandemic

This is my reflection and recollection of personal events and interactions before and during the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. Currently, the date is May 13th, 2020. I started writing around 5:39 P.M., but by the time I'll have finished this, it might be another day at another time. Although I don't really think that this writing could be very important to historians in the future, I'll leave that up to the reader and future historians to decide. As of now, the Coronavirus is still active. The information I'm going to describe is some of what I have experienced in this pandemic so far. Please bear in mind that my memory is not the best, so I apologize in advance for any inaccuracies.

I had been hearing about the Coronavirus before it came to America. I listen to Sacred Heart Radio, a Catholic radio station local to Cincinnati (Channels 740 AM, 910 AM, and 89.5 FM, respectively). Often, Sacred Heart Radio provides both local and world news, and, as a commuter student, it is in my drives to and from school where I would hear about China's sufferings. My heart was with those in China, and I often felt sorrow for those suffering. In a sense, I was able to relate with individuals (e.g., Mother Saint Teresa) who hold a yearning desire to care for the sick and poor in foreign countries. Ultimately, however, I knew I had neither the funds nor the ability to do anything like that. Nevertheless, it is through Sacred Heart Radio that I would learn about China and the Coronavirus. What is especially interesting is that even now you can go back to previous recordings of *The Son Rise Morning Show* (a program on Sacred Heart Radio) and hear the gradual increase in the number of those afflicted.

When the Coronavirus did start coming into the Americas, most of the country, except the affected states, was still going about a daily living. My family and I were still going to Mass, and we even talked with friends afterwards about the virus. Then, like a monologue out of a

dystopia film, more and more people started getting sick. I think the first death I can remember was in a nursing home, but I also remember New York was hit hard. There was that one poor New York lawyer who had it but didn't realize he had it, and then assumedly went on subways and restaurants.

I had been absent with an allergy a few days prior to Spring Break. Specifically, as my professors would be able to attest, I was absent Thursday and Friday with an eye allergy. Usually what happens is my eyes become swollen and have a burning or stinging sensation. It looks a lot like the disease known as "pink eye," but it's actually just an allergic reaction to pollen, dust, animals, etc. Nevertheless, the point is that I was out of commission a few days before Spring Break. The way I remember it is that the virus really started spiking during Spring Break. First it hit Hamilton County, then it hit all of Ohio, and soon after that Indiana and Kentucky. Isn't it odd how the COVID-19 pandemic happened during Lent, just like how the Notre Dame burning happened during last year's Lent? In any case, eventually the governors started shutting down restaurants, churches, and eventually the states pretty much went into shutdown.

By the middle or the end of spring break, I got the e-mail saying Xavier was pushed to online learning until late April. Then, eventually, came the second e-mail, explaining how Xavier wasn't going to do in-person classes for the rest of the school year. It was probably the next few days, now going into the second week of spring break (since the school year and spring break were pushed back by a week), that I received the flood of e-mails from professors who were trying their best to readjust to online learning. I'd say the university made a really good choice with that.

In the following weeks, I've been here with my family, doing homework, and pretty much doing the same routines as before the shutdown. I've had some classes work asynchronously, and others in which we zoomed at the time we would normally have class. More recently (just Wednesday, the 13th, actually), I went on a virtual information session about a master's program at Xavier. I even gave my thesis defense online. Honestly, though, that stuff has not really bothered me. The only thing that's been really weird is not doing any of our usual religious activities. For example, every Lent my family and I pray at the Mount Adams prayer steps. You see, every year on Good Friday (or Holy Thursday at or after 12:00 A.M.), faithful Catholics go to Holy Cross-Immaculata Church in Mount Adams and pray on the steps leading up to the church. It's sort of a pilgrimage, and one that I would recommend to any Catholic. It was weird not participating in it this year. Even weekly Sunday Mass has been stopped – thankfully, we can still watch Sunday Mass on the different Catholic media that offer it (shout-out to the *Eternal Word Television Network!*).

These are only some of the events that my family and I have experienced since the COVID-19. That's not including the changes that everyone has been experiencing, such as the grocery shopping, which now involves waiting in the car with a mask on while an individual places food in the trunk. As I predicted yesterday, I did indeed pick this paper back up the next day, which is today, May 14th, 2020, between the 9 and 10 P.M. hour. I can't really think of much else to say in terms of events, but I do have a concluding reflection:

I had the mindset at the beginning of this as I do now: as a Catholic, I firmly believe that all things happen with a purpose and a reason. I do not believe that God sent this pandemic upon us, like someone sending their dog after an intruder. Rather, I believe that God allows things to happen according to His Will. God is looking out for us in ways that we may not be able to

understand or see, but I have a trust in God that good will ultimately come from this pandemic. As has been communicated with at least one friend before, I believe that many saints-to-be (i.e., people who will eventually become canonized) are alive during our lifetime. Possibly, and very likely, some saints may even emerge from this pandemic.

Yes, this Coronavirus is, in many ways, like a desert. It's a spiritual desert for those souls who cannot go to their churches and praise God. It is an emotional and social desert, forcing us to deny being around friends and, for many, even family. It is a desert in which, for many, the heat toils our minds and our bodies, especially the first responders who are denying (metaphorical) water for themselves in order to give it to another. It is a desert that tests our patience and questions our strength. However, God has not left us. God is still with us. Christ tells us, as He told His Apostles, "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20 *NABRE*).¹ We might be in a desert, but we are not deserted.

I imagine many throughout this pandemic have wondered how they are able to help. Often have I thought about the Christians of the early first centuries, such as Saint Cyprian, who, along with many others, entered into the streets to care for those infected with a plague, even when it killed them.² I ask, "should we, as Christians, do this, too?" It's a difficult question, one that I humbly admit do not feel worthy of providing advice on. However, in my personal opinion, I feel that it is best to stay home so that I do not risk getting it myself and consequentially provide further burden for the doctors and nurses, who are already taking care of so many. However, does this mean that we as Christians, should do nothing? No, actually.

¹ A special thanks to USCCB.org for their online version of the *NABRE*.

² I've learned about Saint Cyprian and the plague through Mike Aquilina's book, *The Church and the Roman Empire (301 – 490): Constantine, Councils, and the Fall of Rome*. (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press.)

There are plenty of opportunities that we can take that helps a neighbor without threatening our safety or the safety of others.

During the spring break, a friend and I were texting about COVID-19. Remembering I struggle with OCD, he caringly asked how I was impacted by this. Thanks to God, I've been doing okay, but it is in small acts of kindness like this that Christians are able to live the faith during such a crisis. Therefore, in the event that you are reading this reflection and the virus is still around, I encourage you to try to help someone else today. Do you have extra canned goods or supplies? Maybe you can donate to a charity. Helping someone could even be as simple as sending an e-mail or a text to a friend to make sure he or she is doing alright. Even when the virus is gone, I still recommend acting in this way. What harm is there in helping a classmate or colleague? As Saint Francis of Assisi has said, "Preach the Gospel at all times... if necessary, use words." Thank you for reading this, and I hope you stay safe.

A. M. D. G.