

Teaching the Faith with CURRENT EVENTS

The Coronavirus: Confronting Fear with Faith

Overview:

In December 2019, Chinese authorities detected a new outbreak of coronavirus (since named COVID-19), a novel strain of an existing respiratory disease. Since its discovery, cases of this new coronavirus have spread around the world. Though the situation is still developing, many millions are worried about the threat of a deadly pandemic and wonder with uncertainty what might lie ahead.

Yet the voice of Holy Mother Church rings bright and true above the frightening din of the world. She re-presents Christ in the Sacraments and eternally echoes His message for all humanity: “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!” (Mark 6:50)

The truth is that Christ’s love banishes all fear. Pope Francis called the faithful to remember this, and to remember our call to be witnesses of Christ to the world, during his Sunday Angelus on March 8, saying “The love of Jesus has no measure...Being witnesses of Jesus is a gift that we have not deserved: We feel inadequate, but we cannot hold back with the excuse of our inability...Jesus says to us, too: ‘Stand up, and do not be afraid.’” As Christians we must not allow the grip of fear to prevent us from following our Lord and answering His call to holiness. No matter what unfolds in the future, nourished and strengthened by Jesus Christ we know by faith that we can weather any storm!

In this lesson your students will:

- Discover what the Church teaches about caring for the poor, the sick, and the suffering.
- Discuss our role as Catholics in caring for the poor, sick, and suffering—including those who suffer from fear.
- Examine the hope that Christ gives to all His Holy Church.
- Understand that having a relationship with Christ banishes all fear, and that the Church is a beacon of hope to the world.
- Consider the ways we can reflect the Love of Christ directly into the world around us, especially in response to the fear concerning the coronavirus epidemic.

Resources:

- **“French Bishop: Fear the ‘Epidemic of Fear’ More than Coronavirus”**, from the *National Catholic Register*: <https://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/french-bishop-fear-the-epidemic-of-fear-more-than-coronavirus>
- **“Pope Francis Via Livestreamed Angelus: Be Strong in Faith Amid Coronavirus Trial”**, from the *National Catholic Register*: <https://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/pope-francis-via-livestreamed-angelus-be-strong-in-faith-amid-coronavirus-t>

Warm up Activity: Read the Scripture verses below, and then answer the reflection questions.

Joshua 1:9:

I command you: be strong and steadfast! Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD, your God, is with you wherever you go.

Philippians 4:6-7

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Mark 6:48-51:

When it was evening, the boat was far out on the sea and he was alone on shore. Then he saw that they were tossed about while rowing, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out. They had all seen him and were terrified. But at once he spoke with them, “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!” He got into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were [completely] astounded.

Matthew 25:34-40:

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you think fear has to do mostly with the present or the future? Why?
2. Fear has been called the opposite of faith. Can you explain why this might be the case?
3. Whom do we encounter when we care for the poor, hungry, ill, and imprisoned? How can we, as Christians, comfort those who are fearful about current events in the world?

Fear vs. Faith

- First, have your students read over the Gospel passages in the warm-up activity and either individually or in small groups consider the reflection questions.
- Then, give the class ***Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 1500, 1501, 1505, & 1509**, along with the articles “**French Bishop: Fear the ‘Epidemic of Fear’ More than Coronavirus**”, and “**Pope Francis Via Livestreamed Angelus: Be Strong in Faith Amid Coronavirus Trial**”, from the *National Catholic Register*.
- Arrange your students into groups of three or four. Have them discuss what they read in the *Catechism* and compare it with what they read in the articles using the discussion questions.
- When each group has finished discussing, call on groups to share with the class some key points from their conversations.
- Close with the prayer of St. Bernardine of Siena, patron of those with respiratory illnesses. Encourage your students to make their prayer intentions for the health and safety of all people everywhere, and that the sick and dying receive the comfort of Christ.

Answer Key

Focus and Reflection Questions

1. *“In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death” (CCC 1500).*
2. *“Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him” (CCC1501). Accept reasoned answers.*
3. *“Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the “sin of the world,” of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion” (CCC 1505). Accept reasoned answers.*
4. *“‘Heal the sick!’ The Church has received this charge from the Lord and strives to carry it out by taking care of the sick as well as by accompanying them with her prayer of intercession. She believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies. This presence is particularly active through the sacraments, and in an altogether*

special way through the Eucharist, the bread that gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health” (CCC 1509). Accept reasoned answers.

5. *Accept reasoned answers.*
6. *Accept reasoned answers. Fear can draw our focus away from Christ, and from the good of our neighbor, to focus solely on our own good or self-preservation. Fear can even lead us to see others as a threat, in the case of wars or epidemics, and thus we lose sight of their inherent human dignity. Fear also prevents us from taking up our crosses, following Christ, and greeting Him in everyone we meet. Essentially, it prevents us from loving.*
7. *Accept reasoned answers.*
8. *Bishop Roland asks “Doesn't the collective panic we are witnessing today reveal our distorted relationship to the reality of death? Does it not manifest the anxiety-inducing effects of losing God?” He also says “we want to hide from ourselves the fact that we're mortal, and having closed off the spiritual dimension of our life, we're losing ground. Because we have more and more sophisticated and efficient techniques available, we claim to master everything and we obscure the fact that we're not the masters of life!” Accept reasoned answers. The Catechism states “In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death” (CCC 1500), and “Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God” (CCC 1502).*
9. *He says “the church is not a place at risk, but a place of health. It's a place where we welcome the one who is Life, Jesus Christ, and where through him, with him and in him we together learn to be the living. A church has to remain what it is: a place of hope!” Accept reasoned answers.*
10. *As Christians we belong to Jesus Christ, for we have given our lives to Him and we follow Him even to the end if necessary, strengthened by the grace He gives us through His Church and the Sacraments. Accept reasoned answers.*
11. *Accept reasoned answers.*
12. *Pope Francis encourages the faithful to “live this difficult moment with the strength of faith, the certainty of hope and the fervor of charity.” Accept reasoned answers.*
13. *He says, “We must not forget that the baptism that we received made us witnesses.” He also tells us that “Jesus says to us, too: ‘Stand up, and do not be afraid.’” Accept reasoned answers.*
14. *Accept reasoned answers.*

Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 1500, 1501, 1505, & 1509

Directions: First, read the paragraphs from the *Catechism*, followed by the article “**French Bishop: Fear the ‘Epidemic of Fear’ More than Coronavirus**”, from the *National Catholic Register*, found at the following link: <https://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/french-bishop-fear-the-epidemic-of-fear-more-than-coronavirus>, and “**Pope Francis Via Livestreamed Angelus: Be Strong in Faith Amid Coronavirus Trial**”, from the *National Catholic Register*: <https://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/pope-francis-via-livestreamed-angelus-be-strong-in-faith-amid-coronavirus-t>. Then, with your group, discuss and answer the focus and reflection questions.

CCC 1500 Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.

CCC 1501 Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.

CCC 1505 Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the "sin of the world," of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.

CCC 1509 "Heal the sick!" The Church has received this charge from the Lord and strives to carry it out by taking care of the sick as well as by accompanying them with her prayer of intercession. She believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies. This presence is particularly active through the sacraments, and in an altogether special way through the Eucharist, the bread that gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health.

Focus and Reflection Questions

1. According to the *Catechism*, what do we experience when we are faced with illness or suffering? What is it that illness allows us to glimpse?
2. What are the two general human responses to illness? Why do you think that illness often leads people to search for God?
3. What has the Incarnation changed forever about human suffering, sorrow, and pain? How did Christ interact with the sick, and why did He not heal all of the sick?
4. According to the *Catechism*, what charge has the Church received from Christ? How is Christ's healing presence most active in our lives? Explain.
5. Do you think the Holy Eucharist is good for our spiritual health? Explain. Do you think the Holy Eucharist is good for our physical health? Explain.
6. How can fear prevent us from seeing the needs of others? How can it prevent us from living our Faith?
7. In 1933, during the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said in his first inaugural address: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." Compare and contrast Roosevelt's statement with what you read in the *Catechism* and *National Catholic Register* articles. Do you think it is relevant in light of the world's reaction to the coronavirus? Why or why not?
8. In the first article, what deeper issue does Bishop Roland say the collective panic over the Coronavirus illustrates? How does this relate to what you read in the *Catechism*?
9. What is a church, what do we receive there, and how should we value it, according to Bishop Roland? Can you connect this to what you read in the *Catechism*?
10. As Christians, to whom do we all belong? How do you think this should form the way we live and interact with others?
11. Bishop Roland suggests that by giving in to fear we are in danger of becoming the "living dead." What do you think he means by this? Can you connect this idea with what you read in the *Catechism*?
12. In the second article, what three things does the Holy Father Pope Francis encourage the faithful to live with? Can you give some examples of how we might do this?
13. What does Pope Francis encourage us to remember about our Baptism? What does he say Jesus is telling each of us? Do you think the world needs to hear Jesus' words? Why?
14. How can we prudently comfort and care for those in our lives who suffer from fear, or who are afflicted with a physical illness? What can we do to reflect the love of Christ into their lives?

Prayer of St. Bernardine of Siena: Patron of all who suffer respiratory illness

Teacher: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

All: Amen.

All: Jesus, Name full of glory, grace, love and strength!

You are the refuge of those who repent,
our banner of warfare in this life,
the medicine of souls,
the comfort of those who mourn,
the delight of those who believe,
the light of those who preach the true faith,
the wages of those who toil,
the healing of the sick.

To You our devotion aspires;
by You our prayers are received;
we delight in contemplating You.

O Name of Jesus,
You are the glory of all the saints for eternity.

Amen.

Teacher: St. Bernardine

All: Pray for us!