

May 15, 2020

Probably more people than not have no religious faith or beliefs that are premised on “out of this world” convictions or notions. I would suspect that most people in the world have no need for any kind of a “god” or pantheon of supernatural personages or angels or spirits.

People who express no religious belief in general no longer use the term atheist or agnostic, especially younger people, because no religious beliefs is assumed to be the norm and nothing special outside of select groups of, mostly, advantaged people who see their advantages as their entitlement because they have the “right” values which are predictably more social and cultural than anything Jesus Christ taught or believed.

Many, many people, as has always been the case, are passionately and intelligently and deeply committed to “life in this world,” some with sincere religious convictions and many without, but “life in this world” is the focus of their lives and they work not with an eye to reward or punishment in some real or imagined after life but because this world is where they live and now is when they do it and now, this present moment, is the only time that anyone actually has.

Unique to the United States over the course of the last 25 or 30 years, we have this hybrid kind of religion, often, called “Christianity,” held together and fueled by the internet and based on various conspiracy notions that people use to create an identity that sets them apart and gives them a sense of righteous power to confront very selective notions of evil over an against others.

This kind of “Christianity” takes no account of history or the processes of history and depends almost exclusively on Old Testament ideas, if it depends on anything other than raw emotion, and again, very select ideas in those texts that have no traction with Jesus Christ, or the Gospels found in the New Testament.

The idea that truth is a valid category that has to be tempered by some kind of verifiable evidence is foreign and alien among these groups and truth has become whatever I feel it to be and want it to be or wish it to be, always, subject to change.

Yesterday, in an interview with ABC 7 Cardinal Cupich of Chicago very calmly explained that the right to worship is not an absolute right but a right to be tempered and considered in harmony with other rights.

He was talking about the resumption of Sunday Liturgies in the Archdiocese of Chicago as contrasted with an obligation to act for and preserve the common good, in this instance, that common good is the right to life, the right to health that needs to be protected for everyone.

Chicago, by the way, if the numbers indicate it is prudent to reopen, will begin with small groups of 10 or less for baptisms, weddings, and funerals, not Sunday Masses.

That being said of the 30 or so people who responded to my request last week to tell me what to do as far as “reopening,” a term I do not like since we have never closed, reopening our parish for Sunday Mass every single one said, “Not yet. It is too soon.”

Some of our neighboring parishes are “reopening” with parish celebrations of First Communion with just the child and two parents participating, no grandparents, no godparents, no one else.

In a random check with some of our First Communion families, that idea was rejected in favor of waiting and doing First Communion the way that we do it and not let the kids think it is some rote, mechanical ritual to be done like a sports physical.

So, we will see what the numbers indicate as we move through May and give the data a chance to surface as churches reopen and we will continue to consult with public health professionals who continue to caution that this rush to church is unwise, too soon, and may prove to be very dangerous for all of us.

So, be patient and be well and take some time to consider what it is you believe and why you believe it and who called you to belief.