

## *5th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

I put myself on the waiting list of the Jackson County Health Department to receive a vaccine against the virus that causes covid-19. I look forward to joining the growing number of people receiving the shots to protect my own health and the people around me. Pope Francis and Bishop Johnston have both encouraged Catholics to receive the vaccine, promoting it as a good moral choice.

Some Catholics have expressed opposition to the vaccines because researchers used cell lines from aborted fetuses. The Catholic bishops of Missouri issued a joint statement on this in November. They advocate ethical means for medical cures to diseases. They wrote, “We renew our call for the scientific community to reject the use of fetal tissue from abortions for scientific discovery and medical research; instead, these corpses should be granted the same respect one would offer the remains of other human beings.” Then the bishops say that the abortions in question took place decades ago, and to receive a vaccine today is not the same as participating in an abortion in the past. They write, “The vaccines currently in development which utilize problematic cell lines, however, should not keep Catholics from seeking vaccination. Preserving one’s health and that of others outweighs the remote association with past abortions which were neither desired nor intended by those now using the vaccines.”

The Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also prefers ethically irreproachable vaccines. But it declared in December, that when these are not available, “it is morally acceptable to receive vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.” The Vatican encourages pharmaceutical companies and governmental health agencies “to produce, approve, distribute and offer ethically acceptable vaccines that do not create problems of conscience for either health care providers or the people to be vaccinated.” It says that getting vaccinated is not a moral obligation, but “the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed.” Those who refuse vaccines for reasons of conscience “must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles of the transmission of the infectious agent.”

The US bishops state that both Pfizer and Moderna avoided “morally compromised cell lines in the design, development, or production of the vaccine.” Both did execute a confirmatory test with one. The bishops conclude, “in this case the connection is very remote from the initial evil of abortion.” Other vaccines becoming available are more compromised, so given a choice, Pfizer or Moderna is preferred, though all are acceptable. After vaccination, we are urged to ask the pharmaceutical company to commit itself to ethically sound processes.

You can tell in today’s gospel from chapter one of Mark, Jesus considered healing a priority. After the mother-in-law of Simon, “He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons.” He traveled to many villages to preach and to cure. Wherever he went, people brought the sick to him and listened to his message. I hope you will join me in bringing your arms to a needle so that through the miracle of medicine Christ can heal us, and we can help stop the spread of a virus that has crippled society. Our love for the health of others will demonstrate we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

Sunday, February 7, 2021