

Archbishop Smith: Contact Tracing

Now, this is fascinating technology. In Alberta, as in other jurisdictions, an app has recently been made available for download to enable something called “contact tracing.” By means of the app and with the use of Bluetooth connectivity, one’s smartphone will connect with that of another in close proximity and having the same app so as to keep a record of the contact. In this way, if I am diagnosed with COVID-19, then anyone my phone indicates has come close to me will be contacted by medical officials. I would likewise be contacted if by chance I had come in close contact with a known carrier of the virus. Self-isolation of all parties will follow. Tracing contacts in this way will help stop the spread.

The very idea of “contact tracing” is something we could apply to our lives as disciples of the Lord. We have just celebrated “Good Shepherd Sunday,” which reminds us that, as a baptized people, we are committed to following where Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads us. In the passage we heard from St. John (10:1-10), Jesus speaks of thieves and robbers attempting to get into the sheepfold to steal the sheep. Such sheep-rustlers take the form of any influence that so acts upon our lives as to seduce us away from fidelity to our calling. To put it in other terms, when we come into contact with such influences we run the risk of catching that dangerous virus we call infidelity. To stay faithful to the Lord, then, it would be very helpful to trace these contacts and then isolate ourselves immediately from their influence. This would alert us to examine our lives for symptoms, and help assure we are not carriers of the contagion to others.

This kind of “contact tracing” does not need an app. What it does require is time for a prayerful review of daily interactions. For example, what contact do I have with television programs that carry messages contrary to the Gospel, or social media sites using language or images not in keeping with Christian dignity, or literature promoting a vision of the human person that cannot be reconciled with a genuine Christian anthropology, etc. If I have caught the infidelity virus, it will show itself in such symptoms as bitterness toward others, restlessness of heart, and indifference or anger toward the Gospel or the Church. If I am not careful, I might by my words or actions pass on this disease to others. Tracing these kinds of contacts will help me end the connection and halt the contagion.

On the other hand, I could also trace good contacts with a view to enhancing them: the Bible and Catechism, the sacraments, the lives of the saints, friends or family members or known personalities whose Christian example would be good to emulate, fellow parishioners with whom I could unite (even virtually) in the study of the faith, and so on. These are the sorts of contacts that promote what Pope Francis is fond of calling the “good contagion”, the spreading of fidelity to Christ and the joy that accompanies it.

I don't know how many people will make use of the contact-tracing app to help stop COVID-19. I earnestly hope that we shall all "download" the habit of tracing the contacts that influence our life of discipleship, so that we can self-isolate from the "sheep stealers" and draw near to those that help strengthen our fidelity to the Lord.