

# Archbishop Smith: Living with Limit

I gather from news reports that many people are chomping at the bit right now to have medical restrictions eased so that life can begin to get back to some degree of normalcy. It has been about a month since directives from the Chief Medical Officer have placed rather strict limits on our movements and activities to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In their press conferences, political leaders and medical experts strongly encourage us to have patience, stay the course, and remain faithful to the measures imposed upon society for our own individual and collective good. They are right to do so, and deep down we all know it. Ignoring these limitations would place ourselves and others in peril.

There is an important lesson for us in this. Indeed, there is broad recognition that we should pay close attention to many things we are learning throughout this difficult process. Often I hear people speak of the “reset” that will need to happen as we come out of this pandemic. Now that we have time to reflect upon experience, our perspectives on what is important, and thus on what could change in the way we live, are shifting. I propose we take a good look our relationship with limit. We are feeling keenly right now that we don't like limit – not one bit! We much prefer to do whatever we desire whenever we want, so we recoil – often in anger or even rage – when it happens that we cannot.

The peaceful acceptance of limit has been at the heart of God's call to humanity from the very outset. Just think of the famous tree from which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat. That prohibition is of enormously significant symbolic value; it represents the invitation from God to accept the fact that, precisely because we are creatures, we are limited and dependent. From this acknowledgement arises the further invitation to trust in the wisdom and providence of God, whose kindness and power know no limits.

As we look to the post-pandemic era, and as we reflect upon the necessary limits within which we have had to conduct ourselves, we would do well, I suggest, to consider other kinds of limits that we typically try to resist or overcome, so as to learn to live peacefully within them once again. For example, respect for the inherent dignity of every human life has been abandoned in favour of unbridled access to abortion, and is being increasingly cast aside as we remove safeguards against the establishment and expansion of assisted suicide and euthanasia. In the world of science, ethical considerations and moral imperatives are not always accepted as boundaries beyond which experimentation must not proceed. The rights of the poor – both individuals and nations – can get overlooked when we are seized with a desire to accumulate wealth.

The irony is that the more we strive to move beyond limit in the pursuit of personal freedom, the more we are held bound by our self-centered pursuits. I

think here of the famous teaching of Jesus; “The truth will make you free” (John 8:32). Truth is the limit that liberates; the truth about God and ourselves. Reaching beyond this limit leaves us enslaved – at great peril to ourselves and others – to the illusion of self-sufficiency.

As we struggle with the limits currently imposed upon us by the necessary medical directives, let’s focus, too, on our contention with the limits that arise from the truth of things. By God’s grace, may that struggle be changed to acceptance in a “reset” that enables us to live peacefully and joyfully as the children of God.