

Pope prays for coronavirus victims and workers who died helping them

Pope Francis asked people to pray for all victims of COVID-19, including the health care workers who sacrificed their lives caring for others.

“Let us pray today for the dead, for those who, because of the virus, have lost their lives. In a particular way, let us pray for the health care workers who have died in these days, who gave their lives in the service of the sick,” he said at the beginning of his morning Mass March 18.

As of March 17, there were 97 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Alberta. The virus has caused a worldwide pandemic with 569 cases in Canada and more than 200,000 worldwide. As of March 18, there have been 8,272 deaths.

In his homily, the pope reflected on how God is always close to his people, walking with them as a loving father.

God would also like his children to be close to him and to each other, the pope added.

However, humanity sometimes responds in the opposite way, as can be seen in Genesis, he said.

Adam and Eve, for example, ran from God and tried to hide because they sinned and were ashamed, he said. And when Cain killed his brother, he washed his hands of the deed, telling God he was not his brother’s keeper.

Sinning can lead people to want to be distant from God, he said, especially when people only think of God as a judge, they will try to “hide” because they are scared.

Hiding and denying responsibility are two ways humanity tries to avoid being close to God and each other, the pope said.

But look at how God made himself “weak” and humble by becoming man, so he could live and be “among us,” and by dying on the cross – the cruelest form of death at the time, reserved for murderers and the worst of sinners, he said.

God lowers himself “to be with us, to walk with us, to help us,” Pope Francis said. “Our God is near and asks us to be close to one another, not to become distant from each other.

“In this moment of crisis because of the pandemic we are experiencing, he is asking that we show this closeness even more,” he said.

Understandably, people may not be able to be close physically because of the risk of contagion, but “we can reawaken in ourselves an attitude of being close together, with prayer, with help, in many ways,” he said.

“Why should we be close to each other? Because our God is close and he wants to accompany us in life,” which is why Christians are not people who distance themselves from God and others.

The pope asked that people pray for the grace to be close to others and not “wash their hands” of personal responsibility, like Cain, believing something is someone else’s problem.

“No. Be close, be near” to each other, he said.