

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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Every once in a while I come up with a sure-fire plan to solve a problem. I am convinced I have thought of all the possible consequences of my strategy and so it will be a great success. Yet, sometimes my plan backfires and causes more problems than it solves. These experiences remind me that a plan is only as good as the information you have and that you have to factor in the unexpected.

In today's First Reading, the Jewish authorities begin a severe persecution against the Church in Jerusalem which they think will lead to its extinction. The execution of the Deacon Stephen, a leader of the Christian community and an effective proponent of its teachings, was likely the first step in a plan to throw the Church into confusion. This strategy has been used by many tyrants to stay in power: kill opposition leaders and their followers will disperse. Earlier, the Rabbi Gamaliel reminded the Jewish Council of previous popular movements which ended when their leadership was killed. With Jesus (the movement's founder) and Stephen now dead, it would only be a matter of time before the other leaders would be executed and their teachings disappear. Yet, the authorities' plan backfired. The persecution caused Christians to flee into the countryside (as far as Samaria) and spread the Gospel message. Dispersed over a wider area, it would be difficult to locate and arrest Christians. While efforts to do this (led by Saul) continued, they would become harder as the persecuted fled further away. As with the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon, pagan rulers may be unwitting instruments used by God to unfold his plan.

Recently, I heard some people commenting on the fact many of the dire predictions of the number of Covid-19 cases and deaths made by medical and government officials did not happen. For some individuals this seems to prove these experts do not know what they are talking about and the restrictions they imposed should be relaxed. Their plans backfired. While I am not an expert on computer modeling, I know a projection is only as good as the data you have and can only outline possible scenarios. If you look at what was happening in Italy four to six weeks ago and the rate of increase within Canada the projections made were understandable. With only a limited knowledge about the virus (how fast could it spread) and no idea whether Canadians would follow the guidelines laid out by the experts (how much could be spread be reduced) there were many things the modelers couldn't predict. Was it not better to err on the side of caution? It would be ironic if a plan to relax the restrictions imposed because of Covid-19 in an effort to get things back to "normal" backfired because a new wave of infections broke out.

Catholics and other people of faith are aware how often their plans can backfire. It is a reminder that it is God who is in charge not them. Uncertainty is something with which they must learn to become comfortable. Perhaps, they can teach others how to master that challenge. It isn't that individuals and organizations should not be planning for how they are going to get through the pandemic and after it, it is just they may encounter a few backfires along the way.