

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has recently prompted a lot of conversation about globalization. Six months ago, the virus affected the lives of a few thousand people in Wuhan, China. Today, it has spread to almost everywhere on the planet, infected over 3.5 million people and killed almost 250,000. The interconnected nature of the world through such things as global trade and travel patterns is seen as a major contributing factor to its rapid spread. The forces of anti-globalization have been around for a while and many of them seek to divide the world into units based upon nationality, ethnicity, language or religion. However, could this process lead to greater problems down the road? How is it possible to live as a unique local community within a diverse and interconnected world?

In today's First Reading, Peter is criticized by certain Church leaders for eating unclean foods with uncircumcised believers. The early Church consisted primarily of Jews who shared a common religious tradition, language and culture. Judaism required all males to be circumcised and forbid the eating of certain foods deemed "unclean". When a persecution of Christians began in Jerusalem, they fled into the surrounding areas and brought the Christian message with them. Since many of the people they encountered were not Jewish, how could they be integrated into the Church? Did they have to become Jewish first? The answer to these questions required the ability to separate what united Christians from what divided them. At the core of the Christian message was an understanding of Christ's identity and mission in addition to the demands of discipleship. During his ministry, Jesus allowed his disciples to eat grain on the Sabbath, kept an adulterous woman from being stoned to death and healed on the Sabbath despite the fact these actions were seen as breaking the Jewish Law. Through Peter's vision God revealed that all foods were clean. It took the Church a long time and a number of serious arguments to determine how it could exist as a unique local community distinct from its surrounding culture while being open to all people of the world. This struggle has continued for 2,000 years and is no doubt as difficult and complex today as it was for Peter and his companions.

With the closing of borders at all levels, competition for limited medical resources and a looming economic downturn the temptation to uncouple from the global scene is growing. There are political leaders who will use this crisis to sow division within their own societies and among countries. Nations are accused of hiding essential information or not acting to stem the spread of the virus sooner. Certain groups are targeted as the cause of the spread of the virus. No doubt every nation or group must share a portion of the blame for our present situation. However, such actions only undermine the trust which is necessary to gain the cooperation needed to deal with the crisis. It would be folly to think disconnecting from the rest of the world will make us safer. International trade is essential to the world economy. The virus will evade all efforts at border control. All of our local communities have to work together. This is only possible if we truly understand that what unites us is more important than what divides us.

Catholics and other people of faith may be able to contribute to this process. Although religious traditions have serious doctrinal differences, most share a belief in a common creator who is

benevolent and merciful. Their traditions also are spread across the world. They can bring together unique local groups often composed of individuals from a variety of cultures, languages and races and form them into a larger global community. They have experience in separating what is more and less important in life. This ability enables them to avoid being distracted by the differences which seem to draw the most attention in our diverse world.

Globalization does not have to lead to the uniformity some people fear. Instead, it can help unique local communities fit together into a common front against such problems as the Covid-19 pandemic.