

Column

Yesterday I visited an elderly care facility in Blairsville where, in order to make a visit, I had to be interviewed and fill out a form. Both are due to concerns over infecting residents with the coronavirus.

From the outset, let me say I am thankful these measures have been put in place. The most vulnerable need to be protected. Hygienic practices aimed at breaking the chain of infection should be learned and completely followed.

Soap and water to the hands is a prudent response to the current crisis, but, also -- I want to suggest -- is prayer from the lips. Indeed, in the end, the latter may prove to be the most productive response of all, as the following story will show.

At the end of the 6th century, a plague was ravishing the city of Rome. People were dying in large numbers. In response, Gregory I, the Bishop of Rome at the time, called the population to repentance and prayer. A massive procession was organized in which a solemn litany was chanted.

Litany, by the way, is a type of prayer in which both leader and people go back and forth with petitions and responses. One partly drawn from ancient sources is found in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and continues to be used today.

When the procession reached the Mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian, Gregory saw a sight that brought peace to his soul – an angel of the Lord was standing atop the castle of Crescentius, wiping a bloody sword and sheathing it. Gregory took this as a sign that the plague was at an end, as indeed it was. Thereafter the castle was called the Castle of the Holy Angel.

Eventually a statue of St. Michael the Archangel, sheathing his sword, was put on the top of Castel Sant'Angelo, which remains a constant reminder of the mercy of God and how he responded to the prayers and supplications of the people.

During this present crisis, instead of relying solely on scientists and government leaders to save us, should we not, both as individuals and as a people, be turning to the Lord, seeking our help from Him?

From lightning and tempest; from earthquake, fire, and flood; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death.
GOOD LORD, DELIVER US. AMEN.

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