

***COVID-19 Vaccines**

There have been a number of stories both within areas of Michigan and nationwide which have highlighted how some of the special sites to handle hundreds and thousands vaccinations a day are not finding enough recipients. This is true even as the numbers and severity of cases move into another surge. This is not because most adults have been vaccinated. They have not. In every state anyone sixteen and over can make an appointment for a vaccine, so there is no shortage of possible recipients. No one, of course, is morally mandated to get vaccinated. On the other hand, if one chooses not to be vaccinated, then there comes with that the moral responsibility to be even more diligent with mask and other safety protocols. Having said that, I do want to address one misunderstanding that might affect especially how some Catholics have thought about the vaccine. I have posted a “Faith Byte” video on the topic of the “The Moral Acceptability of the Current COVID-19 Vaccines,” where I go into a bit more detail on these matters.

The misunderstanding I see is the belief that only some of the vaccines are morally acceptable. This misunderstanding arose, I think, because of the concern about using vaccines that are connected to cells derived from a fetus that was aborted many years ago. All the current vaccines have used such cells either in the production of the vaccines or in the testing of the effectiveness of the vaccine in its initial stages or both. As a result, when speaking on the morality of these vaccines, many bishops focused on the idealized situation, where someone can receive any of the vaccines in an equally timely way, all vaccines are equally effective and have no discernibly different side effects, and the person is given a choice over which one to receive. In such an idealized situation, then the moral choice would be to choose the vaccine least connected to the past abortion. Such an analysis, though, became misunderstood as a statement that certain vaccines are morally acceptable and certain ones are not. Although I have read of some statements from individual bishops that implied that, that is not what the U.S. Conference of Bishops said. That is definitely not what the Vatican or Pope have said. There is great value in the bishops calling our attention to the use of cells from aborted fetuses in research, reminding people that there are ways to do such research that have no connection to abortion, and that companies and researchers need to build their research in the most ethical ways possible. But it would be a shame to confuse this important advice with a judgment that we cannot be vaccinated or only certain vaccines are currently acceptable.

In the real world scenario we are in, where the more quickly the vast majority of people are vaccinated, the less likely variants will take hold and the closer we will be to overcoming this devastating pandemic, people will be doing a morally upright thing to be vaccinated with whichever vaccine is available to them. Vaccination is considered so remotely connected to the evil of abortion that no one is doing something morally wrong by receiving any of the vaccinations. The bottom line: All currently approved vaccines in the United States (Moderna, BioNTech-Pfizer, Johnson and Johnson, and AstraZeneca if approved) are morally acceptable. Moreover, one has a moral obligation to promote the common good. One very good way to do this is to get a vaccine. If that is not possible or one believes it is in their best interest not to, then one can support the common good by encouraging others to be vaccinated, take precautions about wearing masks and other safety protocols, avoid extended gatherings that do not use masks or follow other safety protocols, and the like. If one is given the choice of which vaccine to receive and fits the idealized situation mentioned above, then you are encouraged to choose at this time the Moderna or BioNTech-Pfizer one, since they did not use such cells in developing the vaccine, only in testing its effectiveness. But if another vaccine is available in a more timely manner or if another vaccine is better suited to your health (for example, some only want to receive one dose, not two), then another vaccine such as Johnson and Johnson is equally morally acceptable. More discussion about this topic on the “Faith Byte” video at our stregis.org website.

