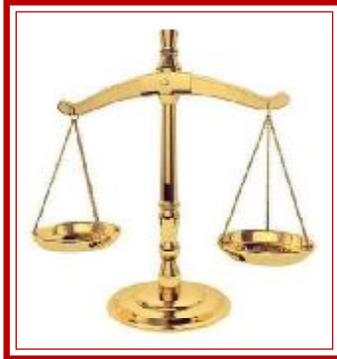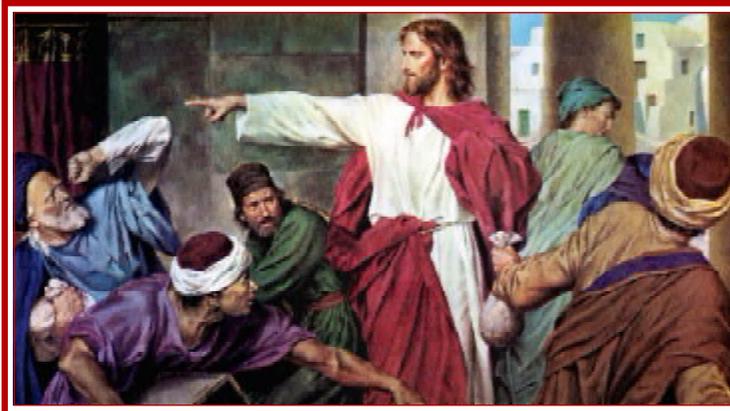# YOU WERE ASKING . . . by Msgr. Pat Stilla

Q. Why is it that the Catholic Church and other Churches, Mosques and Synagogues all over the world and in our own country, have obeyed Government restrictions on religious services and have obeyed orders to shut their doors in the midst of this pandemic? As you have often mentioned, history shows that in times of religious persecution when churches were ordered to be closed and services forbidden by Kings and Emperors, Christians fought back by disobeying those orders. Why haven't we done the same today and pushed back against government restrictions?

A. At first glance, your suggestion about "pushing back against government restrictions" in this pandemic, sounds fairly reasonable and the evidence you cite about civil disobedience in past situations by persons of Faith is historically sound. However, the one phrase you use which changes everything is, "in times of religious persecution". In other words, only when it was clear that restrictions against Faith practice was motivated by hatred or by any other evil and not for the common good, did believers "push back"! "If the motive is evil, then the action is evil" This phrase expreses one of the guiding principles of Christian morality. It is our belief that the motive behind an action usually determines whether the action itself is good or evil. It is clear that when persons of Faith in the past perceived that the motives behind government restrictions on Faith practice were not for the common good but rather for the destruction of Faith, they rightfully "pushed back" against them. Examples of "push backs" in history

♦ *The "push back" of Christ in the Temple*
One of the most dramatic events in the life of Christ is the so called, "cleansing of the temple" as is recorded in John`s Gospel *(2:14-16)*. To fully understand Jesus' reaction here, it is important to remember that at this time it was a common and ethically accepted practice among the Jews, for vendors to sell birds and animals in the Temple precincts for the convenience of pilgrims who needed the animals to offer as sacrifices to Yahweh. What was not customary, however, was the evolving evil practice of deliberately overcharging for these goods so as to ensure enormous profits for the sellers. When Jesus said, "Stop making my Father's house into a den of thieves!", it was not the selling of goods to which He was reacting. Instead He was "pushing back" in reaction to the evil practice of 'gouging' people; an evil based on greed, which was being perpetrated in 'His Father's House of Prayer'.

♦ *The "push back" of the first Christians*
Christian worship was illegal and punishable by death in the Roman Empire until 313 A.D. Since it was unjust and motivated by evil, Christians rightly "pushed back" against this restriction and defied the Romans, by praying and worshipping the Lord in hiding.

♦ *Other "push backs"*
Whenever religious restrictions were imposed in history because of evil motives, persons of Faith rightfully should have and did oppose them. Should we "push back" in this pandemic?
No, we should not and must not! Government restrictions around the world today to limit large gatherings in many sectors of society are clearly not motivated by evil intentions. They are in place to promote the common good and the wellbeing of the human race, which should be the goal of us all. Moreover, our Bishops, including the Holy Father have all reviewed and endorsed the restrictions. We observe them and pray for each other.