News



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of Calif., speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill, Friday, Sept. 18, 2020, in Washington. (AP/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

Lisa Mascaro

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The Associated Press

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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi pushed back Friday against the Catholic archbishop of San Francisco's criticism of COVID-related restrictions, saying he should "follow science" rather than advocate for fuller in-person gatherings for Mass and worship.

Asked about Archbishop Salvatore Joseph Cordileone's recent op-ed protesting limits on larger public gatherings, Pelosi, a practicing Catholic, said he should not be putting people's lives at risk.

"With all due respect to my archbishop, I think we should follow science on this," Pelosi said.

The right to worship has become a fierce touchstone in the debate over state and local rules to stem the spread of the coronavirus. The bishop said worshipers' rights are being "unjustly repressed," by the government. Nationwide, several churches are suing to halt restrictions.

"We recognize that the government has a right to impose reasonable public health rules," he wrote in The Washington Post. "But when government asserts authority over the church's very right to worship, it crosses a line."

Pelosi said she attended in-person service recently in her San Francisco hometown, and received communion — picking up the wafer from the priest, as is allowed, rather than having it placed directly on the tongue. She regularly joins online services.

"I miss going to church regularly," she said.

The California Democrat said she had to sign up in advance to attend, and found about a dozen people spread out once she arrived. "Very, very, very spaced," she said.

She questioned whether the archbishop's message was misunderstood. "I'm sure he must have meant if it is scientifically safe, rather than jeopardizing people's health if they want to go to church," she said.

Pelosi noted that faith and science are sometimes seen at odds.

"Around here, people say to me, You're a person of faith, why do you believe in science?" she said.

"I say, I believe science is an answer to our prayers. It is a creation of God, and one that is an answer to our prayers."

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