



## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Tuesday, 24th March 2020

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has sent us a message after the Prime Minister's historic announcement last night (23 March) strengthening restrictions in an attempt to combat the spread of COVID-19.

The Cardinal stresses that we must all play our part to safeguard the NHS and to save 'precious lives'.

"We're going to play our full part in it. That was the call of St. Paul that we ought to be good citizens and today we ought to be good citizens playing our part in the protection of the vulnerable, in our support for the NHS and in the preserving of human life, which is so precious to God in the face of this virus."

Cardinal Nichols also points to the Sunday just gone to demonstrate the strength of the Catholic community's response and its commitment to keeping prayer and worship at the heart of a new pattern of life:

"We're beginning to reflect on the experience of the streaming of the celebration of Mass on Sunday and on yesterday's week day. There are many, many encouraging signs. I've heard of congregations being 10 times the normal size. I've heard of families preparing together at home. Families having their own little children's liturgy during the reading of the Word..."

"...So we have to deepen our prayer. We have to use the Internet, and all the other things that we have, to encourage one another."

### **Full Text**

This morning, we are all coming to terms with that most remarkable, historic, dramatic announcement of the Prime Minister last night. He made our duty very clear. And it's a duty which we must all wholeheartedly follow. That is the right thing to do because he wants us to play our part in stopping the spread of this virus – in helping to protect and get the best use of the NHS and therefore save precious lives.

What is clear to me and to my fellow bishops and to the Prime Minister is that we must now close our churches.

It's not essential for people to travel to go to church in order to pray. We have to learn more and more that our prayer is rooted in our hearts and can be shared with our families. Open churches will only tempt people to travel. And that is not good practice now. So we have to deepen these words of prayer. We have to use the Internet, and all the other things that we

have, to encourage one another. When you phone your parents or your parents phone you, why not suggest that you end with a moment of prayer together? Say that Hail Mary, say a prayer that you know – but say it together. It's a comfort and a reassurance.

The second thing about this morning is we're beginning to reflect on the experience of the streaming of the celebration of Mass on Sunday and on yesterday's week day. There are many, many encouraging signs. I've heard of congregations being 10 times the normal size. I've heard of families preparing together at home. Families having their own little children's liturgy during the reading of the Word.

Families joining in the singing or providing their own music – if there wasn't any music in the church itself. In these coming weeks – and there will be many of them – we can strengthen this sense of being part of the celebration of the Mass via the Internet. And of course there is that important act of spiritual communion, when at the same moment, we join with the celebrants of the Mass and all those who are taking part in it online and spiritually receive the Lord into our hearts.

These are challenging times. We're not looking for loopholes. We're not trying to find ways round this provision. We're going to play our full part in it. That was the call of St. Paul that we ought to be good citizens and today we ought to be good citizens playing our part in the protection of the vulnerable, in our support for the NHS and in the preserving of human life, which is so precious to God in the face of this virus.

May God bless you and let's keep going wholeheartedly together.

Thank you.



## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Monday, 23rd March 2020

At this time of uncertainty and anxiety with our churches closed for public worship, Pope Francis has called on the world's Christians and people of goodwill to join together to pray the Lord's Prayer on :

**Wednesday, 25 March at 11am UK time** (midday in Rome).

The 'Our Father' is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples and the first prayer many of us learned to pray.

We will carry the broadcast on our channels and ask that our visitors gather virtually in this way as a simple powerful act of solidarity.

### **Adoration and Urbi et Orbi blessing**

Having prayed the Angelus on Sunday, Pope Francis also revealed that on :

**Friday 27 March at 5pm UK time** (6pm Rome),

he will pray on the steps of St Peter's basilica. Although the square will be empty, there will be a period of Adoration and readings from Scripture.

### **Plenary Indulgence**

At the end of the service, the Holy Father will impart his Urbi et Orbi blessing and will offer a Plenary indulgence for the COVID-19 pandemic.

He asks that we join together to uphold the universality of prayer, compassion and tenderness.

Pope Francis encourages us to "remain united and make our closeness felt – especially with healthcare professionals and those who serve."

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done on earth,  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

### **Link**

We will carry the live broadcast of these events but please keep an eye on the:  
[Vatican News YouTube channel](#).



## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Thursday, 19th March 2020

Many people are asking how we will observe Easter this year in these difficult times. Here's some guidance from Rome in the form of a decree.

### **Decree for the Celebration of Easter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments**

*In time of COVID-19*

During this difficult time which we are living because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and considering the impediment to the community celebration of the liturgy in church as per the direction of Bishops for their territories, a number of queries have come to this Congregation concerning the imminent celebration of Easter. In this regard, the following general indications are offered along with some suggestions for Bishops:

#### **1 – Concerning the date of Easter**

Easter is the heart of the entire liturgical year and is not simply one feast among others. The Easter Triduum is celebrated over the arc of three days which is preceded by Lent and crowned by Pentecost and, therefore, cannot be transferred to another time.

#### **2 – The Chrism Mass**

Having evaluated the concrete situation in the different countries, the Bishop has the faculty to postpone it to a later date.

#### **3 – Indications for the Paschal Triduum**

Wherever the civil and ecclesiastical authorities have put restrictions in place, the Sacred Triduum must be celebrated in the following way:

Bishops will give indications, which have been agreed with the Episcopal Conference, so that, in the Cathedral and parish churches, though without the physical participation of the faithful, the Bishop and parish priest(s) can celebrate the liturgical mysteries of the Paschal Triduum.

The faithful should be informed of the times of the celebration so that they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes. On this occasion, the means of live (not recorded) televisual or internet broadcasts are helpful.

The Episcopal Conference and individual dioceses will see to it that resources are provided to support family and personal prayer.

#### **Holy Thursday**

In Cathedral and parish churches, where and in the measure that there is a real possibility of doing so, established by the one responsible, the priest(s) of the parish can celebrate the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper.

The faculty to celebrate Mass on this day in a suitable place, without the people, is granted in an exceptional manner to all priests. The washing of feet, which is already optional, is to be omitted.

At the end of the Mass of the Lord's Supper the procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose is to be omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle. Priests who are unable to celebrate Mass should instead pray Vespers of the day (*cf. Liturgia Horarum*).

## **Good Friday**

Good Friday, in Cathedral and parish churches, where and in the measure that there is a real possibility of doing so, established by the one responsible, the Bishop/Parish Priest will celebrate the Passion of the Lord. In the Universal Prayer, the Bishop will see to it that there is a special intention for the sick, the dead, for those who feel lost or dismayed (*cf. Missale Romanum, pag. 314 n. 13*).

## **Easter Sunday**

### **The Easter Vigil**

Is to be celebrated only in Cathedral and parish churches, where and in the measure that there is a real possibility of doing so, established by the one responsible. At "The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium" the preparation and lighting of the fire is omitted, the Paschal Candle is lit, the procession is omitted and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) follows.

The "Liturgy of the Word" then takes place. For the "Baptismal Liturgy" the "Renewal of Baptismal Promises" alone is necessary (*cf. Missale Romanum, pag. 371, n. 55*). The "Liturgy of the Eucharist" then follows.

Those who have absolutely no possibility of uniting themselves to the Paschal Vigil celebrated in a church should pray the Office of Readings for Easter Sunday (*cf. Liturgia Horarum*).

Decisions regarding monasteries, seminaries and religious communities shall be made by the Diocesan Bishop.

Expressions of popular piety and processions which enrich the days of Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum can be transferred to other suitable days in the year, for example 14 and 15 September, according to the judgement of the Diocesan Bishop.

By mandate of the Supreme Pontiff, for the year 2020 only.

From the offices of  
the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments,  
19 March 2020,  
on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church.

Robert Card. SARAH  
*Prefect*

+ Arthur Roche  
*Archbishop's Secretary*



## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

### **Liturgical Advice for the Bishops of England and Wales in the light of the COVID-19 Pandemic 18th March 2020**

*This advice will be reviewed and developed as necessary weekly*

The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, having consulted the Ordinaries of the Dioceses, has agreed that the cessation of public liturgies should begin from Friday evening 20th March 2020. Because of the situation the Church finds herself in, the obligation for the faithful to attend Holy Mass on a Sunday or Holy day of Obligation is removed, until further notice.

The following instruction is now given for the celebration of the Sacraments and sacramentals of the Church at this time.

#### **Celebrations of Holy Mass**

Priests (parish priest and assistant priests) who hold parochial office should continue to celebrate Mass in a church within their parish without the faithful on a daily basis. Other priests (i.e. retired from office or entrusted with a non-parochial ministry) may celebrate Mass without the faithful in a church, chapel or their private home. Deacons should not participate in these celebrations.

The continuing celebration of Mass ensures that the faithful can join in spiritual communion with the priests of the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states (1364): As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out. Daily liturgical resources for those at home, including those for making a "Spiritual Communion" with the priest, will be available on the CBCEW website.

Information about the live-streaming of the celebration of Mass will be made widely available in our dioceses so that the faithful can participate in the prayers of the priest at Mass at home. A fine example of this is from The National Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham will continue its full liturgical programme and this will be available to all via the Internet ([www.walsingham.org.uk](http://www.walsingham.org.uk))

Wherever possible, during this period, churches will remain open, especially on Sundays, for individual private prayer, without any organised services, and offering prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

#### **Baptisms**

Baptisms should be deferred until such time that the public health advice is that congregations can gather safely. In case of necessity, baptisms should be celebrated with all the hygiene precautions that have been laid down by the Church in its COVID-19 advice.

#### **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Confession may be offered on request as long as hygiene and social distancing requirements are observed (eg a physical barrier between the penitent and the priest such as a grille and cloth). The use of Rite II and Rite III of the Rite of Penance is not permitted as this, by necessity, requires the gathering of people in our churches.

#### **First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion**

These celebrations should be postponed until a time that allows for families and friends to gather safely within our churches.

#### **Confirmation**

The celebrations of Confirmation should be deferred until such time that the public health advice is that congregations can resume public worship.

**Matrimony**

If possible, the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony should be deferred until such time that people can gather in numbers safely. However, if this is not possible and only in the most pressing of circumstances, then those present for the marriage should be restricted to the celebrant, bride and groom and immediate family, and if necessary, the legal Registrar.

**Anointing of the Sick**

No pastoral visits should be made to people who are self-isolating until the isolation period ends. However, do offer phone support. When anointing the sick, the Oil of the Sick can be applied using a cotton bud which can be burned afterwards (one end for the head and the other for the hands) and the priest extend his hands over the sick person for laying on of hands, without physical contact. This has been confirmed as a valid mode of celebrating the sacraments which involve “laying on of hands.” Visits to people in care homes or hospitals should follow advice from the staff on infection control.

**Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil**

This will be dependent on the forthcoming decisions of the Bishops for the Holy Week ceremonies.

**Funerals**

There must be great pastoral sensitivity to this issue. The funeral service should take place at the graveside or at a crematorium, subject to the conditions laid down by the cemetery or crematorium authorities. Arrangements should be made for a Mass to be celebrated in memoriam when congregations are allowed to gather.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas  
General Secretary

18th March 2020

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## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

### **A letter from the President and Vice-President on behalf of all the Bishops of the Conference**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, so many aspects of our lives must change. This includes the ways in which we publicly express our faith. It is very clear that, following official advice and in order to keep each other safe, save lives and support the NHS, at this time we must not gather for public acts of worship in our churches. This will begin from Friday evening, 20th March 2020, until further notice.

Our churches will remain open. They are not closing. They will be a focal point of prayer, where you will find solace and strength. In visiting our churches at this time, we will observe with great care the practices of hygiene and the guidance on social distancing.

However, the celebration of Mass, Sunday by Sunday and day by day, will take place without a public congregation.

Knowing that the Mass is being celebrated; joining in spiritually in that celebration; watching the live-streaming of the Mass; following its prayers at home; making an act of spiritual communion: this is how we share in the Sacrifice of Christ in these days. These are the ways in which we will sanctify Sunday, and indeed every day.

We want everyone to understand that in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed. This is, without doubt, the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the 'serious reason' why this obligation does not apply at this time.

You will find more details about the pathway of prayer and sacramental life we are now to take in the accompanying document and on the Bishops' Conference website ([www.cbcew.org.uk](http://www.cbcew.org.uk)). Your own bishop and parish priest will provide further support, encouragement and information about our way of prayer together in the coming weeks.

The second vital aspect of these challenging times is our care for each other. There are so many ways in which we are to do this: being attentive to the needs of our neighbour, especially the elderly and vulnerable; contributing to our local food banks; volunteering for charitable initiatives and organisations; simply keeping in touch by all the means open to us.

During these disturbing and threatening times, the rhythm of the prayer of the Church will continue. Please play your part in it. The effort of daily kindness and mutual support for all will continue and increase. Please play your part in this too. For your commitment to this, we thank you.

*'The Lord is my shepherd,  
There is nothing I shall want.'*

May God bless us all.

Vincent Cardinal Nichols  
President

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP  
Vice-President

18th March 2020