

Dear Parishioners:

We received the directive today from Archbishop Kurtz to suspend the public celebration of Mass until further notice, as means of hindering the spread of the Coronavirus. As difficult as this is for everyone in the Church (especially wise and faithful bishops like Joseph E. Kurtz), this seems to be the consensus of public health officials as well as churchmen. Many other dioceses are doing the same thing, and I wouldn't be surprised if all dioceses in the country did the same thing by week's end. I admit to being in ignorance about many matters such as this, and I'm not going to protest now that the decision is made. But I do wish there were another way. That having been said, wishes are cheap. Let us all just pray together, very hard, that our parishes may resume normal functioning very soon.

The question for parishes then becomes, *what now? Is anything else going on?*

- Some meetings have already been cancelled until further noticed, e.g., CCD, Youth Group/Young Adults. Other groups that normally meet will be notified.
- On weekdays the church will remain open for prayer during its normal hours, namely 7:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.
- Eucharistic exposition is suspended during this time. But Jesus Christ is no less present to us in the tabernacle than in the monstrance, so please take advantage of that great gift of his to the Church. So you see, we still have the Eucharist—just not the public celebration of the Mass, or the individual reception of Holy Communion. Draw near to him, and pour out your heart. It's an act of faith that will cause your faith to grow, not weaken, during this period of testing.
- Stations of the Cross may not be prayed communally. The text for Stations can be found toward the back of the Pew Missal, and worshipers are encouraged to pray them individually, often.
- Confessions will still be heard at daily at 11:00 a.m., Sunday through Saturday.
- *The parish Mass intention schedule will be observed—in our conventual Mass those intentions will be offered on the day they were scheduled.*

So, basically, the church will remain open during normal weekday hours (reduced weekend hours), with just the sacrament of Penance being offered—which is a great thing, by the way! I agree that this is a far cry from what we had before. My first instinct, in lieu of public Mass, was to offer various other forms of devotions, and especially lots of Eucharistic exposition. The problem with that is that we are not supposed to be doing anything to draw people out of their homes; the whole point of the drastic measures being taken is to eliminate occasions of transmission of the virus, and many may unwittingly have it. The general figure given for maximum social gatherings (even religious) is 50 persons, with the proper “social distancing” being observed (6 feet minimum).

This is very difficult for all of us—the Dominicans here as well as you. But since there is no equivalent substitute for Mass, it is now especially counter-productive to offer lesser forms

of (communal) spiritual activities which could in fact abet the spread of the disease. Let us be determined to do our bit to help. Perhaps we'd make different decisions if we held positions of authority. But we don't, and right now, *obedience is better than sacrifice*.

This is all so new, literally quite unprecedented, and it's hard to know what to do and think, but the faith of Catholics needn't suffer because of these restrictions. Our faith never needs to suffer! If it does, it can only be because we consent to a falling away. In times of persecution, the ancient Christians experienced a flourishing of faith and conversions. Under the boot of Communism, countless saints were made—including and especially a future Polish Pope. Though deprived of receiving Christ sacramentally, you can receive him just as fruitfully, or perhaps more fruitfully, through turning to him in prayer and asking for his grace. There's an old adage in the Church we all need to remind ourselves of now: *Deus non ligatur sacramentis*: God is not bound by the sacraments. In other words, God is our savior, and the author of grace. The ordinary means of the communication of grace to us is through the sacraments, since God wisely deals with us as material beings in a material world. But he is not bound by his own plan: he can give grace in other ways, if he wishes, for it is his to give. Thus the Church does not teach (as some saints thought) that unbaptized infants who die necessarily go to Limbo, for God can supply grace without Baptism. This should not make anyone complacent: God's mercy is supposed to increase our love and gratitude, not beget a spirit of presumption. And those who have to go for a long time without the Eucharist—like Catholics deprived of priests in Cromwell's England or Soviet Russia, or even those of you under social quarantine during the Coronavirus crisis—can receive God's grace, should he wish to give it to us. Let us ask for it, earnestly, and make use of the sacrament of Penance during these days, that our prayers might be purer and our communion with the Trinity fuller.

I will be trying to communicate often with you in writing, through things posted on the website and perhaps even our parish FaceBook page. Let us pray for one another.

–Fr. Peter, O.P.