

March 12, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In ordinary circumstances, Catholics are obliged to participate in Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation. This obligation is suspended in cases of moral or physical impossibility, and may also be dispensed for a just cause when it is for the spiritual good of the faithful. In addition, the Church also has the obligation to protect those who are most vulnerable and those who care for the sick.

Due to the increasing number of confirmed COVID-19/coronavirus cases in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, I determine it prudent to dispense all Catholics in the territory of this Archdiocese from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, until further notice. If the faithful decide that congregating for Sunday Mass would constitute a risk to themselves or others, they have the freedom not to attend. Masses, however, will continue to be celebrated in our parishes as regularly scheduled at this time.

The Mass allows us to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist and strengthens community, so this is not a decision I take lightly. Even for those who stay home, Sunday remains a holy day, and Catholics should still observe the Lord's Day e.g. by making a "spiritual communion" while watching Mass online, on TV, or radio (broadcast 11:00 a.m. on KSTC-TV/45 and 9:00 a.m. on Relevant Radio 1330am). You can pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, and other devotions. You may also decide to attend Mass on a weekday when assemblies are smaller. Those attending Mass any time should continue to minimize the risk of contracting or spreading infection. For details, see archspm.org/covid19.

The spread of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) presents a challenge for everyone, including us Catholics, but it also offers an opportunity. Lent calls us to more fervent prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The current medical situation invites us especially to direct our spiritual exercises to benefit the sick and those caring for them, including the Church's ministers. As God's providence is allowing this trial during the sacred time of Lent, I am asking all the faithful to increase our prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We know the prayer of faith can move mountains.

First, as was done in Rome, I am asking you to join me in a special day of fasting, abstinence, and prayer invoking God's help in these challenging days for our Archdiocese, our country and the world. This day will occur next **Wednesday, March 18, 2020**, between the Feast of St. Patrick (March 17) and the Solemnity of St. Joseph (March 19). On that day, I invite Catholics who are ordinarily bound to observe fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday to prayerfully make this same sacrifice next Wednesday.

Second, I encourage the faithful to engage in additional prayer. I highly recommend praying a daily Rosary as a family or individually, but other forms of prayer and devotion are also suitable. From biblical times until the present day, history confirms that when the faithful unite in prayer and fasting, powerful things happen.

Finally, let us continue to pray for the sick and dying, for those caring for them (including priests and deacons), and for those working to minimize the impact of COVID-19. Let us pray for our own protection and care, for those who fear death without knowing the Lord's loving care, and for strengthening our hope of eternal life. Let us also remain calm and look out for all our brothers and sisters in need: those in our families, in our neighborhoods, and around the world. When we unite for the common good, we can overcome fear and courageously face the challenges in the days ahead.

Seeking both the intercession of Our Lady, Help of the Sick, and the graces that pour forth from the merciful heart of Jesus, I remain,

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis