

Resources for Caring for Our Spiritual and Sacramental Lives While Public Gatherings Are Suspended

ENCOUNTER GOD'S MERCY

Read these powerful words from our Holy Father, Pope Francis

“What If Cannot Leave Home...” The Holy Father recognized that before Easter, many faithful go to Confession to meet with God again. “However,” he acknowledged, “many will say to me today: ‘But, Father, where can I find a priest, a confessor, because one can’t leave home? And I want to make peace with the Lord, I want Him to embrace me, that my Papa embrace me . . . What can I do if I can’t find priests?’”

“Do what the Catechism says,” the Jesuit Pope stressed, “it’s very clear: if you don’t find a priest to hear your Confession, talk with God, He is your Father, and tell Him the truth: ‘Lord, I’ve done this, and that, and that . . . I’m sorry,’ and ask Him for forgiveness with all your heart, with the Act of Contrition and promise Him: ‘Afterwards I will go to Confession, but forgive me now.’”

“If you do all this,” Francis said, “you will return to God’s grace immediately. As the Catechism teaches,” he reminded, “you yourself can approach God’s forgiveness without having a priest at hand. Think: ‘it’s the moment!’ And this is the right moment, the opportune moment. An Act of Contrition well made,” Francis said, “will make our soul become white as snow.”

– Pope Francis, *Daily Mass Homily, Friday of the Third Week in Lent,* 20 March 2020

Examine your conscience

There are many resources available: apps, websites, etc. Click here for a variety of examinations of conscience: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience.cfm>

Ask God for his mercy

With true sorrow for your sins out of love for God (perfect contrition) and with the resolve to confess them as soon as possible, make a good act of contrition.

Sample prayers can be found here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/act-of-contrition.html>

Obtain a Plenary Indulgence

An indulgence is yet another way that God extends his mercy to us. It is a sign that God's mercy is stronger than our sin. More specifically, an indulgence is "a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1471).

Think for a moment: when a child breaks his mother's vase while playing ball in the house and asks for forgiveness, his mother forgives him. However, she still enacts some sort of "temporal punishment." For example, she may have him use his allowance to purchase a new one. The same is true with God. He forgives our sins totally and completely, but out of justice we must make reparation for the wrong that we have done. This is the blessing of purgatory – the opportunity to be completely purified so that we can be in God's presence forever. However, an indulgence is the opportunity to be purified of all temporal punishment now. The Church is able to grant indulgences (not sell them!) because Christ has given her, through the ministry of Peter, the power of the keys: "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:19).

Therefore, the Apostolic Penitentiary of the Holy See has granted that the following may obtain a **Plenary Indulgence**, that is, full remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, when they do the following along with the usual conditions for obtaining an indulgence (i.e., sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion, and prayer for the Holy Father's intentions) as soon as possible:

1. The faithful suffering from the Coronavirus, subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they: (a) unite themselves spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, (b) recite the Holy Rosary, (c) engage in the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or some other form of devotion, or, at least, recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters.
2. Health care workers, family members, and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine Redeemer. "No man has greater love than this: to give his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13)."
3. Those faithful who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic Adoration, or the reading of Sacred Scripture for at least half an hour, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, to implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and the eternal salvation of those whom the Lord has called to Himself."
4. "The Church prays for those who are unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and the Viaticum, entrusting each and every one of them to Divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a Plenary Indulgence on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. *Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, n.12)."

- Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary, *On the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic situation*, 20 March 2020

PARTICIPATE IN THE OFFERING OF THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

Reflect on the presence of God and on spiritual communion:

For Catholics, the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life. ... For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1324). This teaching has received particular emphasis since the Second Vatican Council which proclaimed “that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 14). For Catholics, Jesus is really present in the bread and wine of the Mass which becomes His body and blood.

What, then, are Catholics to do at a time when Churches are closing their doors and streaming Mass online? How does one receive the real presence of Christ in these times?

First, it is important to remember that Catholics believe that Christ is really present in the Mass in four ways: one of them is in His body and blood. The other three ways are in the priest, in the readings when they are proclaimed (the Liturgy of the Word), and in the assembly of people who gather for worship (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7). So, when one gathers with family or friends to watch Mass on Youtube or other media, Christ is present in their gathering together (“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” [Matthew 18:20]). He is also present in the priest who appears before the altar and in the readings as we hear them. Yet, there remains the importance of receiving Christ in his body and blood. How is this possible when one cannot be present before the altar?

In absence of receiving the body and blood of Christ, the Church teaches that one may receive the real presence of Christ through what it calls “**spiritual communion.**” On this topic Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI writes, “Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, No. 55). Consequently, one receives the grace of communion through a genuine and ardent desire to receive Christ in the body and the blood. Thus, St. Thomas Aquinas writes that “the effect of the sacrament can be secured by everyone if they receive it in desire, though not in reality” (*Summa theologiae* III, q. 80, a. 1). In this way, spiritual communion can be “extremely profitable ... for this impresses upon us a deep love of the Lord” (Saint Teresa of Ávila, *The Way of Perfection*, Chapter 35). In so doing, it is an opportunity for the faithful to remind themselves of “the eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have” so as to continue living “in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, No. 72).

- Saint Joseph’s College, Maine

Reflect on the Word of God proclaimed

Before participating in the celebration of the Eucharist, take some time to meditate on the scripture readings that will be proclaimed. Visit <http://uscgb.org/> and click on the calendar of daily readings. Or, use the following free resources, which provide the daily readings, prayers, reflections, and more:

Magnificat:

<https://us.magnificat.net/free>

The Word Among Us:

<https://wau.org/meditations>

Give us this Day:

<https://giveusthisday.org/Digital>

Participate in the celebration of the Eucharist

Parishes around the diocese are streaming the celebration of Mass. Check your parish website/social media posts and join your local community.

Mass from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception with Bishop Lucia is livestreamed each day. Click here to join in this celebration: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmmi_XzzKVE

Receive the presence of Christ through spiritual communion:

As you gather to watch Mass during this challenging time, remember that Christ is really present among you and that the grace of the sacrament is available to you through a genuine desire to receive it. After praying the Our Father, you can also pray the following together:

*Jesus, we believe that You are present
in the Most Holy Sacrament.
We love You above all things,
and we desire to receive You into our souls.
Since we cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into our hearts.
We embrace You as if You were already there
and unite ourselves wholly to You.
Never permit us to be separated from You. Amen.*