



## ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

March 20, 2020

Dear Brother Priests, Deacons, and all members of the faithful who are part of our Diocesan Family,

Peace be with you! This is my second letter to you during this time of national and worldwide emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic. First, allow me to extend to you the powerful words that Jesus spoke to his disciples when they were in the midst of a storm on the water, being tossed about in a boat by the wind and the waves: **“Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid”** (Matt 14: 27). We are, indeed, in turbulent times, being tossed about by the waves of this pandemic. We are hindered, but not prevented, in our ability to be nourished and to respond spiritually. Nevertheless, we should not be afraid. The Lord is with us.

Second, allow me to provide you with the following updates:

**Today, the Apostolic Penitentiary of the Holy See has granted the following special indulgences to the faithful.** Remember that 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).

The following may obtain a Plenary Indulgence, that is, full remission of the temporal punishment due to sin:

“To 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 unite themselves spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, to the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will 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, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father’s intentions), as soon as possible.”

“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

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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).”

“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.”

“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

**Today, the Holy Father has also reminded Bishops that individual confession is the ordinary way of celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.** Nevertheless, “Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by *votum confessionis*, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1452).”

However, in certain situations the sudden need may arise to impart sacramental absolution in a general manner to several faithful gathered together, for example, at the entrance of a hospital or nursing home where those infected are in danger of death. The diocese is monitoring this situation closely and will act accordingly, designating certain priests to attend to these and other similar situations. However, the conditions are not present for general absolution of the faithful outside of these certain situations who unfortunately cannot go to confession at this time. If the situation changes, you will be informed as soon as possible. Please keep in mind that necessary precautions will need to be put into place so that priests and penitents can gather safely. Likewise, necessary instruction will accompany this permission, in particular, that the faithful must be properly disposed (have contrition for their sins) and intend to confess all serious sins individually after the pandemic ends and the situation returns to normal (c. 962).

- Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary, *On the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the current pandemic situation*, 20 March 2020

**Effectively immediately, all Catholics entrusted to my care as well as those who are within the territory of the Diocese of Syracuse are hereby dispensed from the obligation of abstaining from meat on Good Friday as well as on the remaining Fridays during Lent.** The purpose of this dispensation is to assist those for whom the practice of abstinence is difficult at this time, for example, because of the current shopping situation. However, those who can abstain from meat are encouraged to do so. Additionally, the law of fasting on Good Friday



remains for Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59. It is important that the remaining days of Lent continue to be days of penance and prayer.

**At the present moment, all public gatherings for Mass, prayer, Faith Formation and certain parish activities remain cancelled and the faithful remain dispensed from the obligation to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays. In light of what is known about Covid-19 and its duration, the following provisions for Holy Week and Easter must now also be made:**

The Light is On campaign is cancelled. General Absolution is not permitted.

All public liturgical celebrations and gatherings, specifically, Palm Sunday, The Chrism Mass, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday are cancelled. They are to be celebrated by priests in private. Further guidance will be provided in the days ahead by the Office of Liturgy.

Regarding the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, the elect are dispensed from two of the scrutinies and the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation may take place outside of the Easter Vigil, namely, on any Sunday up to and including the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity (R.C.I.A. no. 34, 2). Further guidance will be provided in the days ahead by the Office of Liturgy and the R.C.I.A.

Celebrations of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are postponed. Further guidance concerning when and how the celebration of these sacraments can take place as well as what is required to prepare those receiving them will be provided in the days ahead by the Offices of Catechesis and Liturgy.

Churches and parish facilities (food pantries, offices, etc.) may remain open with limited personnel following the guidelines of the local government and the Center for Disease Control.

Finally, I am doing everything possible to continue to attend to your spiritual needs. Please stay tuned for media-based opportunities for prayer, reflection, etc. Please also read the diocesan updates that will be available each day at 4:00 PM and continue to visit our website and consult the resources that are posted there, particularly the *Frequently Asked Questions*. Be assured of my continued prayers and support as we weather this storm together, with our eyes fixed on the Lord, waiting for his mercy. May the intercession of our Blessed Mother, Saint Joseph, and all the saints, especially, our own Saint Marianne Cope, bring healing, comfort, strength, and a swift end to this pandemic.

In the Name of Jesus,



Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia  
Bishop of Syracuse