

DIOCESE OF FRESNO
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March 25, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is very hard for me to believe that it has only been about ten days since I sent out to all of our locations certain guidelines and directives regarding the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and other gatherings in our parishes and other locations. The landscape has changed dramatically since. In fact, it changes every day. The pandemic we face has grown and all indications are that it will continue to do so for some time. With that in mind, I am sending all of you this update of MANDATED directives that we will all follow over the weeks to come.

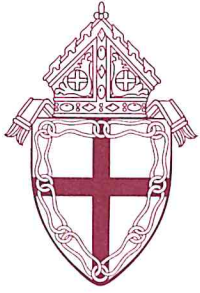
We were all hoping that the restriction on the celebration of public Masses would end by Monday morning of next week, that is, on March the 30th. That is no longer the case. Please advise your parishioners, ministers and employees that the suspension of public Mass and all activities at our parishes will continue INDEFINITELY. Clearly this will directly impact our Holy Week celebrations, RCIA programs and, again, many other activities. On the following pages you will find instructions and directives as to how that will be handled and in what manner and to what extent, if any, some of our Triduum and Easter celebrations can be observed.

This is a kind of 'death' experience for us all. We have given up much this Lent. It has been a true, if temporary, loss. We are dying to ourselves and like Lazarus of this Sunday's Gospel, we too are waiting for the Lord to call us back to life. Like his dear sister, Martha, we are also proclaiming with full voice, "Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

So, yes, my brothers and sisters, there is life on the other side of all this sacrifice and suffering we are currently undergoing. We have all been reminded that there is no Easter without Calvary. But what a glorious Easter it will be, here and hereafter!

In Christ,

Bishop Joseph V. Brennan



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UPDATE ON THE MANDATED DIRECTIVES DURING THE WORLD-WIDE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

TO ALL CLERGY, PARISH/SCHOOL STAFF, AND CATHOLIC FAITHFUL

OF THE DIOCESE OF FRESNO

MARCH 25, 2020

In a Decree from the offices of the Roman CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS (CDWDS), dated March 19, 2020, and mandated by the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Francis, certain questions concerning the upcoming celebrations related to Holy Week and Easter during this serious health crisis have been received by the Congregation. In the Decree sent to me on March 20, 2020 through the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB), the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments outlines specific “indications” for what is to be followed this year (2020) only.

This up-date is being sent to specify what is to be followed in the Diocese of Fresno during Holy Week and Easter this year. Consider these Directives as a continuation of the MANDATE published and sent to you on March 18, 2020. Please strictly follow these Directives without making ANY deviation from them. I am counting on your faithful obedience so that you and all the people entrusted to your pastoral care may remain safe and healthy until this deadly pandemic has subsided. I realize these Directives call for previously un-imaginable departures from the “normal” Holy Week observances, but these measures are necessary and have been approved and mandated by the highest ecclesiastical Authority.

Please carefully study these Directives and follow them:

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 is crowned by Pentecost and, therefore, cannot be transferred to another date.” (*Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and of the Discipline of the Sacraments; In time of COVID-19, #1*)

THE CHRISM MASS –

The Chrism Mass will not be celebrated this year on the traditional date. Since the Chrism Mass is not part of the Sacred Triduum, it can be postponed to a later date. Consequently, I have decided that once the COVID-19 crisis has subsided, I will consider a suitable date later in the year when we can come together to celebrate this wonderful Assembly of all God’s people in union with their Bishop. In the meantime, the use of Holy Oils blessed at past years’ Chrism Masses may be used as long as they have not spoiled over time. Use your best judgement.

PALM SUNDAY and HOLY WEEK -

According to the Decree, the Sacred Triduum must be celebrated in the following way:

All celebrations indicated here must be “without the physical participation of the faithful.” In other words, if priests choose to celebrate the liturgical mysteries of the Paschal Triduum, they have the universal faculty to celebrate them without the people present. “The faithful should be informed of the times of the celebrations so they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes. In this occasion, the means of live-streamed broadcasts are helpful.” (Decree: CDWDS #3) Please note, this means the people may not be invited to participate personally even outside the church (parking lot, open area, etc) as this violates the order given through the civil authorities regarding gathering in crowds. However, at these private celebrations during Holy Week and the Triduum, a maximum of three (3) priests, including the Presider may con-celebrate, and no more than one lector, altar server, and musician may be used. All are to maintain current recommended “social-distancing” regulations. Priests are asked to provide appropriate resources (prayer helps, family/home rituals, etc.) to assist family and personal prayer during these Holy Days.

PALM SUNDAY –

There are NOT to be any distribution of blessed palms; however, if a priest wishes to bless palms PRIVATELY, those blessed palms are to be reserved for distribution at a later date to be determined by the USCCB or directly by the Diocese.

HOLY THURSDAY –

If the priest chooses to celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper, it MUST be celebrated in the evening and, again, without the physical presence of the faithful. The Holy See has granted the faculty to celebrate Mass on this day in a suitable place (e.g. a side chapel rather than the parish church). However, under no circumstance are priests to transfer any Holy Week celebration even outside to accommodate any sized gathering in violation of these Directives. At this private Mass, the washing of the feet is omitted. At the end of Mass, the procession with the Blessed Sacrament to a separate place of repose is omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be reserved in the tabernacle. There is NO adoration following the Mass. Those priests who are unable to celebrate Mass should instead pray Vespers of the Day. If you have a parish website, you may wish to encourage your parishioners to join in the Evening Prayer of the Church for Holy Thursday. Also, further encourage parishioners, where possible, to tune into Channel 49 – KNXT to reverently follow local, national, and international coverage during these sacred days.

GOOD FRIDAY –

The public celebrations of the Solemn Liturgical Action of Good Friday and any public celebration of the Stations of the Cross are suspended until further notice. The Decree from CDWDS provides for the transfer of the Veneration of the Cross to a suitable future date, for example, September 14th - the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Priests may celebrate the Passion of the Lord privately. The Decree from CDWDS recommends that at the Universal Prayer, the Bishop will see to it that there (*be added*) a special intension for the sick, the dead, and those who feel lost or dismayed (cf. *Missale Romanum*, pg. 314 n. 13). Please check the USCCB website for the approved prayer addition.

EASTER VIGIL and EASTER SUNDAY –

The Easter Vigil is to be celebrated (without the physical presence of the faithful) in the Cathedral and the parish churches.

IMPORTANT

In the Diocese of Fresno, the Easter Sacraments for RCIA candidates and catechumens are to be postponed. Please immediately notify the candidates, their sponsors and all others involved that guidance will be further provided when the Easter Sacraments might be celebrated after the COVID-19 crisis subsides. A future date when the Easter Sacraments may be re-scheduled will be made by the Bishop and is not at the prerogative of the local Pastor/Administrator.

At the Easter Vigil celebrated without the physical presence of the faithful, the Decree of the CDWDS mandates that “the Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium, the preparation and lighting of the fire, is omitted and the Paschal Candle is (simply) lit, the procession (with the candle) is omitted and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) follows “The Liturgy of the Word” then takes place... and “The Liturgy of the Eucharist” then follows.” Since the Easter Sacraments are omitted this year only, the entire “Baptismal Liturgy” contained in the Easter Vigil (Renewal of Baptismal Promises, Litany of Saints, Blessing of Baptismal Water, and Sprinkling Rite) is also omitted. For those who absolutely have no possibility of uniting themselves to the Paschal Vigil celebrated in the church they should pray the Office of Readings for Easter Sunday.

Finally, I wish to remind priests, deacons, and delegated Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, there are to be no “Communion Services” currently or during Holy Week and during the Easter Season until we are officially cleared by Church and civil authorities to return to public liturgies.

A FINAL COMMENT –

I am very aware these Directives cause us all to be “conflicted” in light of our deep faith in what Jesus, Our Lord and Savior, accomplished for us through His Passion, Death, and Glorious Resurrection. This faith lives at the heart of all of us – this faith “identifies” us as Disciples of the Suffering and Risen Lord.

Suspending our physical presence and participation in the celebration of these Sacred Mysteries is heartbreaking for all of us – faithful people, vowed religious, deacons, priests, and yes, even your Bishop. My heart aches that these Directives need to be made, but they must be followed. It is a matter of the very faith we so ardently profess that “compels” us to do what LOVE demands of us – to sacrifice (even when it hurts or when it’s uncomfortable or inconvenient) for one another; to protect one another when there is danger, physical and spiritual.

And so, I humbly ask all of you to take this not just as rules to be followed and obeyed, but rather as our *faith-full* response to the “love” we have all received through Christ’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection and to put it to work for our good and the good of our neighbor – especially those most vulnerable among us.

CARITAS CHRISTI URGET NOS

“The Love of Christ Impels Us”