

Archbishop John has sent out an email this evening using the RCAOS system. A copy of this is included below, apologies again for any duplication:

## **To the Clergy of the Archdiocese of Southwark**

Saturday 28 March

*'On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?' (Mark 4:35-41)*

Dear Brothers in Christ

Those words from St Mark's Gospel were the basis for the Holy Father's homily at the extraordinary Urbi et Orbi blessing yesterday at St Peter's in Rome. I am sure that many of you will have watched it on satellite television or via the internet and found it as moving as I did. Just in case you haven't seen it, [I attach the full text of Pope Francis' sermon \(click here for text\)](#). With beautiful and poignant simplicity the Pope reminds us that at this time we are being called to faith by the Lord. We are being called to renew our trust in the Lord Jesus, to cry out to Him in the storm, to draw closer to Him in the boat of the world and of the Church, to be with him in quiet and in silence in the boat of our heart.

I know that having to cease public celebrations of the liturgy, and now to close our churches completely, reducing our pastoral ministry, and celebrating Mass

in private, all carries particular burdens for those of us ordained to actively serve our people. Our compliance with the restrictions in place is an essential contribution to working to combat the spread of the Coronavirus. But let's not forget that we remain in the service of our people. The most important thing we can do for them at this time is to pray for them, and for people locally, nationally, and internationally. We can make the supreme spiritual gift of a daily offering of Holy Mass for our people. What, at present, we cannot do together, we continue to do on behalf of all those whom we serve. We sometimes speak of the Holy Father as the Pontifex Maximus, the supreme bridge builder. Each one of us, if I may put it like this, is a pontifex minimus, a little bridge builder, carrying our people in our hearts, across these troubled waters, to the presence of Christ in the Mass and in our prayers.

I want to say again an enormous thank you to each of you, priests and deacons, for all that you are doing in so many different ways to sustain the spiritual life of our parishes, through the ministry of the telephone, the internet and social media. Most of all, thank you for continuing to pray with faith each day, and offering the Holy Sacrifice to advance the peace and salvation of the world.

In this week's update, please allow me to pass on the following information which I hope is helpful:

#### **1. Live streaming of Mass on the Internet and Social Media**

- a. It is important that good social distancing is modelled in every live-streamed Mass and liturgy.
- b. Wherever possible please continue live-streaming the celebration of Masses from churches across the Archdiocese and advertise the links so that people can follow.
- c. Only one priest alone should be present at any live-streamed liturgy, and without anyone else fulfilling a supplementary role (e.g. organist, cantor, server, reader etc).

- d. In the light of the Vatican Decree of 25 March 2020, live-streamed Masses must not include concelebration. Where there is more than one priest living in a presbytery, forming one unit of risk, concelebration is possible, but all hygiene regulations should be observed and Holy Communion should be by intinction. Again, to avoid any confusion, there should be no live-streaming of concelebrated Masses.

## 2. Funerals

- a. The guidance issued previously remains in force: there are to be no services in church, with only graveside and cremation ceremonies taking place. The local guidance of crematorium and cemetery authorities must be followed. In conducting such prayers, priests must follow guidelines on social distancing.
- b. Given the possibility of increased use of crematoria at the peak of the pandemic, priests or deacons may be asked to provide services at weekends and evenings.
- c. Coffins must not be taken into churches for resting overnight before a committal.
- d. After the pandemic, Masses in memoriam will be permitted in the presence of the ashes of those cremated during this time.

## 3. Limitations on the Ministry of Priests

- a. In the absence of their regular routines, priests should devote themselves to the daily celebration of Mass, prayer, personal formation and keeping in contact with their people by telephone and internet as much as possible.
- b. Visits to homes for **in extremis** celebrations of baptism and anointing of the dying are permitted, observing the necessary hygiene and distancing regulations.

- c. Any anointing of the sick, which is only to be carried out **in extremis**, should follow the guidelines issued previously.
- d. Such ministry to the critically ill and dying is an essential work, for which travel is justifiable.
- e. Parish clergy should not visit parishioners in hospital, but should liaise with the relevant Catholic chaplain. Where a Catholic hospital chaplain needs the assistance of a priest to minister to the critically ill and dying, local approaches will be made as necessary, including to provide cover for a chaplain should he become ill. All instructions by healthcare staff concerning hygiene must be followed.

#### 4. **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

- a. In addition to the earlier guidance, please remember that absolution cannot be given over the telephone.
- b. Services of General Absolution cannot be held as this involves travel and the gathering of people.
- c. Given the demands of social distancing and church closure, requests for individual confession may be difficult to meet. Therefore, it is deemed reasonable for a priest to refuse a request for confession at this time, except **in extremis** where all hygiene regulations must be followed.
- d. Please note: the Apostolic Penitentiary in Rome recently issued a Note about the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Covid 19 Pandemic. It indicates the context for the directive, namely those in healthcare facilities who are gravely impaired because of Covid-19. In such a case, General Absolution, with the Bishop's permission, could be given, for example, at the entrance to hospital wards, where the infected faithful in danger of death are hospitalised, using as far as possible and with the appropriate precautions the means of amplifying the voice so that absolution may be heard. Any hospital or healthcare chaplain is invited to contact me about obtaining the faculty for General Absolution in these very specific circumstances.

## 5. **Easter Duties.**

- a. In their letter of 18 March 2020, the President and the Vice-President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales said "in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed. This is, without doubt, the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the 'serious reason' why this obligation does not apply at this time."
- b. Many of the faithful will be aware of their Easter Duties; that is to receive Holy Communion during the Easter Season and by custom, to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation beforehand. The Code of Canon Law (CIC 920) says each of the faithful is obliged to receive holy communion at least once a year. This precept must be fulfilled during the Easter season unless it is fulfilled for a just cause at another time during the year. The requirement for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation comes from the need to be in a state of grace to receive Holy Communion (CIC 916).
- c. As it is not possible for the faithful to receive Holy Communion at this time, and into the future, the Bishops of England and Wales have dispensed the Easter Duties for the year 2020.
- d. The Bishops have asked that all should make a Perfect Act of Contrition at this time. Perfect contrition (or a Contrition of Charity) is true and real sorrow for our sins which is created when we realise the immense love of God for each one of us. We express this contrition when we realise how we offend God by our sinful words, deeds and omissions in contrast to the immeasurable love and mercy that He continually shows us.
- e. This requires us to be contrite of heart for what we have done, to know and be overwhelmed by the love and mercy of God for His children, and to approach this grace with humility and resolution not to sin again.
- f. An Act of Contrition - My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do

penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Saviour Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

## 6. Finance – Parish & Archdiocesan

- a. You will know from other emails this week that in order to sustain the financial future of our parishes and Archdiocese, we have embarked on a process of furloughing lay employees for the month of April with a review at the end of the month. This means that we can participate in the government's job retention scheme and hopefully give some reassurance to our parish and central service employees. I am grateful for your co-operation in administering this and would ask that you continue to help the finance and HR office with this in every respect.
- b. This is not a time for fundraising in our parishes. Some parishioners have, however, asked how they can support their parish financially at this time and information has been sent about this. Further information, should you need it, can be gained from Canon Richard Hearn VG, the Moderator of the Curia.

## 7. Holy Week

- a. There have been two decrees issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome concerning this year's celebration of Holy Week and Easter in the context of Covid 19. Our celebrations will be without congregations and will, therefore, be much more scaled down events.
- b. I will send our further information about these in the coming week. As things stand, these are the broad guidelines:
- c. **Palm Sunday** - The Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem is to be celebrated within sacred buildings; in Cathedral

- churches the second form given in the Roman Missal is to be adopted; in parish churches and in other places the third form is to be used.
- d. The **Chrism Mass** – I will share more information about this next week. The issue at hand is whether it is to be deferred or not. If it does take place, it will not be a public event and will only involve the clergy at Archbishop's House and the Cathedral.
  - e. **Holy Thursday** - The washing of feet, which is already optional, is to be omitted. At the end of the Mass of the Lord's Supper the procession is also omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle. On this day the faculty to celebrate Mass in a suitable place, without the presence of the people, is exceptionally granted to all priests.
  - f. **Good Friday** - In the Universal Prayer, the Bishops will arrange to have a special intention prepared for those who find themselves in distress, the sick, the dead, (cf. Missale Romanum). These will be forwarded next week. The adoration of the Cross by kissing it shall be limited solely to the celebrant.
  - g. **The Easter Vigil** - Is to be celebrated only in Cathedral and parish churches. For the "Baptismal Liturgy" only the "Renewal of Baptismal Promises" is maintained (cf. Missale Romanum). It is unlikely that the Sacraments of Initiation and Receptions into the Church will take place this Easter and will therefore need to be deferred, but I will confirm this next week.
  - h. Seminaries, houses of clergy, monasteries and religious communities shall follow the indications of this decree.
  - i. Expressions of popular piety and processions which enrich the days of Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum can be transferred to other suitable days in the year, for example 14 and 15 September, according to the judgement of the Diocesan Bishop.
  - j. PLEASE NOTE –DO NOT DESTROY ANY OF THE OILS OF CHRISM, OF CATECHUMENS or OF THE SICK. WHETHER OR NOT A CHRISM MASS IS DEFERRED, THESE WILL NEED TO CONTINUE TO BE USED.
  - k. In the event of particular need, the Oil of the Sick can be blessed by any priest according to the Rite prescribed by the Church.
  - l. Live- streaming of Watching on Holy Thursday will be available from St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham.

- m. I will also be circulating next week a text of a Personal Renewal of Priestly Commitment for priests to use in Holy Week.
- n. The Priestly Fraternity of St Peter will live-stream the Easter Triduum in the Extraordinary Form. The times are yet to be determined, but the current stream webpage can be found at [www.livemass.net](http://www.livemass.net) and then click on Warrington.

It is a great sadness that Archbishop Peter's funeral will take place on Monday with only his close family and the priests of the Cathedral present. Please pray for him, and his family, and all who mourn him at this time of loss. This is effectively a graveside service as Archbishop Peter will be buried in the vault of the Cathedral. We will have a Mass in memoriam once the restrictions are lifted, when we will be able to give thanks for his life and ministry. May he rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.

Tomorrow, in the Cathedral, without any congregation, I will pray, on behalf of the whole Archdiocese, the prayer of Re-dedication of England as the Dowry of Our Blessed Lady. Please join with me, if you can, in making a personal act of entrustment, of yourself and your parish. Details can be found at [www.Behold2020.com](http://www.Behold2020.com).

Please continue to support your brother priest and deacons, praying for them and keeping in touch via all the media available to us. Please also look out, especially, for those who are most vulnerable and pass on any concerns to the Deans who will rely these to the Area Bishop's / Episcopal Vicar. We have had a number of priests who have tested positive for Covid-19. Some are in isolation and, others have recovered, thank the Lord. Please remember them especially.

Finally, please look after yourself. Be firm in faith, constant in prayer, and certain in hope. Be sure of my support should you need anything, and, of course, of my prayers.

'The doorway to Christ is always accessible, because it is not primarily the path of our footsteps, but the way of our heart.' May the Lord renew your heart in these days.



Please pray for me.

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ John

Most Rev John Wilson  
Archbishop of Southwark