



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH  
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



To All Priests in the Diocese of Fort Worth

March 28, 2020

“I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them” (John 10:11-12).

Dear Fathers and Brothers in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ,

One of the joys of the priestly vocation is our annual gathering during Holy Week at the Chrism Mass where we publicly and united together renew our ordination promises prior to the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening in each of our churches, commemorating both the institution of the Holy Eucharist and of Christ's priesthood. This year, however, the Chrism Mass must be postponed due to the extraordinary circumstances of the present pandemic in which we find ourselves. After consultation, I am transferring the celebration of the **Chrism Mass to May 28, 2020** (the Thursday before Pentecost) so that both Priests and faithful can attend. I write to you today in order to ask you in fidelity to our promises of obedience to recommit ourselves to the gift of priesthood during this upcoming Holy Week, and to call you as your bishop towards a deeper reflection upon what that gift of priesthood demands of us in these extraordinary times.

I have spoken to you often as your bishop about this passage from chapter ten of the Gospel of John. I bring it to your attention again now because the sheep have indeed been scattered by the wolves of contagion, fear, and desperation, the bitter fruits of sin. How we now respond to this scattering of the sheep will contribute in guiding the Church and defining us as priests, both in the eyes of the people with whose care we have been entrusted, and when we come before our Lord, Judge of us all, and render to Him an account of the household entrusted to us. **Will we be judged as good and prudent shepherds who lovingly laid down their lives for the sheep, or as hired hands who fled when the wolves came?**

Many of our people already feel abandoned by the Church and Her clergy. The present restrictions on public gatherings by civil authority are just, prudent, and necessary measures to slow down the spread of the virus to minimize the strain upon our society's health care system. Nevertheless, a desperate yearning for the comfort of God and the grace of His sacraments has awoken for many people who have been ordered to remain home and who are anxious about a great many things, from health to personal finances. We cannot turn a blind eye to such people. Instead, we must be even more zealous and creative in finding safe and prudent ways to pastorally accompany our people in crisis.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

I am grateful and proud of you for your dedicated generosity and prudent ingenuity in responding to the pastoral needs of the faithful during these extraordinary circumstances. I know many of you too feel great pain at the absence of the people from your churches. I too suffer deeply this pain but ask us to focus our attention and energies on the pain and longing the people have instead. Live-streamed Masses and acts of spiritual communion, though certainly not the same as physically participating in the liturgy and receiving Holy Communion, nevertheless remain a great comfort to the people who cannot attend and a balm for their sacramental longing. **Thus, I ask you in all charity: if Mass can be livestreamed for the faithful—please arrange to schedule this even for the celebration of daily Mass**, for one of the duties of a pastor is “to see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the parish assembly of the faithful” (c. 528 §2). Insofar as during this time of “shelter in place” or “stay at home” priests must celebrate Mass without a congregation and/or with a server or deacon present (No more than 10 people in attendance including the celebrant), live-streaming daily Mass is the only practical way at present to enshrine the Mass as the center of the parish life.

It is thus a pastoral necessity that Holy Mass continues to be offered every single day throughout the diocese. First, pastors and all with the care of souls remain obliged to offer Mass *pro populo* on every Sunday and holy day of obligation (c. 534 §1). Secondly, “remembering always that in the mystery of the eucharistic sacrifice the work of redemption is exercised continually, priests are to celebrate frequently; indeed, daily celebration is recommended earnestly since, even if the faithful cannot be present, it is the act of Christ and the Church in which priests fulfill their function” (c. 904). Celebrating Mass frequently and reverently is therefore at the very core of our identity and spirituality as priests; more importantly, however, frequent celebration of the Eucharist is at the very core of the nature of the Church and of the acute sacramental longing presently experienced by a great many of the Christian faithful. **Thus, I implore and exhort you as your bishop: ceasing daily celebration of the Mass during this crisis would be a grave mistake. To do so could harm severely your own salvation because the People of God, your parishioners, are counting on you to offer the Mass on their behalf.**

I thank you for your continued ministry and service as priests in the diocese. Please be attentive to all civil restrictions, the norms already in place, and these further adaptations to be observed including for the celebration of Holy Week:

1. During this time of “shelter in place” or “stay at home” priests must celebrate Mass without a congregation and/or with a server or deacon present. (No more than 10 people in attendance including the celebrant). Live-streamed masses may have assistants present to provide for the live-stream presentation. On Sundays, pastors are still required to celebrate Mass *pro populo*. Priests should not celebrate more than one Mass each day, but priests must celebrate (or concelebrate) one Mass each day as a matter of practical and pastoral necessity (see above).
2. If Mass can be livestreamed for the faithful to participate in that way---please arrange to schedule this even for the celebration of daily Mass.

3. In parishes with more than one priest concelebrating and at all masses where a deacon assists, more than one chalice should be used---a chalice for each concelebrant or deacon from which to receive the Precious Blood. **PRIESTS ARE REMINDED THAT THEY MUST RECEIVE THE PRECIOUS BLOOD CONSECRATED AT EACH MASS THEY CELEBRATE OR CONCELEBRATE.**
4. **PRIESTS MUST RECEIVE FROM HOSTS CONSECRATED AT THE MASS AT WHICH THEY ARE CONCELEBRATING---NEVER FROM PREVIOUSLY CONSECRATED HOSTS TAKEN FROM THE TABERNACLE.**
5. For Sundays, when more than one Mass is scheduled (true for most of our parishes) the scheduled masses that are not celebrated must either have the intention and stipend of that Mass moved to another open date, or sent to the chancery with stipend to be celebrated and offered elsewhere. This must be noted in the parish bulletin.
6. Since the Saturday Night Vigil Mass for Sunday is provided only as a pastoral concession to the faithful for the Sunday obligation, the Saturday night vigil Mass must not be celebrated on Saturday night because there will be no people in attendance. No livestreamed Saturday evening masses.
7. The priest should celebrate a Saturday morning Mass. One suggestion is that the priest may offer that Mass for the intention previously scheduled for the Saturday vigil.
8. An intercession/prayer of the faithful should be included at Mass for the End of the COVID 19 pandemic: “For a fast end to the coronavirus pandemic and for healing and strength for all of those affected by this pandemic and its accompanying burdens, we pray to the Lord.”
9. Priests are reminded the administration of the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick **cannot be delegated** to deacons or members of the laity.
10. Priests are encouraged strongly to contact your local hospices and to inform them of your availability for the sacraments of Anointing of the Sick, Penance (Apostolic Pardon in danger of death), and Viaticum for the dying. A suggested and safe protocol for anointing and viaticum will follow in a separate letter.

#### **Palm Sunday**

- Please use the third form of the blessing of palms listed in the Roman Missal. Palms may be blessed to be distributed later at the pastor’s discretion after restrictions on travel and gathering are safely lifted (perhaps on September 14—the Exaltation of the Holy Cross). **TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF CONTAGION, PALMS ARE NOT TO BE DISTRIBUTED IN ANY MANNER ON PALM SUNDAY.**

- Priests should remind the faithful (perhaps on the website or bulletin) that blessed palms and olive branches are kept in the home as a witness to faith in Jesus Christ, the messianic king, and in his Paschal Victory of His Cross and Resurrection.
- The Gospel should be proclaimed by the deacon or in his absence by a vested priest concelebrant (the Gospel should not be proclaimed in the dialogue form customary in masses celebrated with a congregation on Palm Sunday).

### **Chrism Mass**

- The Holy See has permitted the local bishop to transfer the celebration of the Chrism Mass to another date because of the current restrictions on gathering and on travel. After consultation, I am transferring the celebration of the **Chrism Mass to May 28, 2020** (the Thursday before Pentecost) so that Priests and faithful can attend. This date and time are contingent on restrictions that may change or continue because of the pandemic.
- Priests may continue to use Holy Oils already in the Parish until Pentecost Sunday. If a parish is short on the Oil of the Sick or Oil of Catechumens
  - i. Pastoral Care of the Sick contains provisions for the ad hoc blessing of the Oil of the Sick if necessary, please familiarize yourself with it and if further assistance is needed priests may contact the Liturgy office of the Diocese at [dwarner@fwdioc.org](mailto:dwarner@fwdioc.org)
  - ii. Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults does the same for the blessing of the Oil of Catechumens
  - iii. Should a parish need additional Sacred Chrism – they should contact the Liturgy office of the Diocese at [dwarner@fwdioc.org](mailto:dwarner@fwdioc.org)

### **Holy Thursday: Mass of the Lord's Supper**

- The Holy See has granted the faculty for priests to celebrate this Mass without the participation of the faithful. Priests must be assisted by a deacon and/or server in the celebration of this Mass. Whenever possible this liturgy should be live streamed so that the faithful can join themselves to it in prayer. For the same reason, the time of the Mass is to be published in the bulletin and on parish websites.
- There should be **only one Mass celebrated after 7:00 PM on Holy Thursday**. Priests should concelebrate, if possible. **To avoid the spread of the virus priests must consecrate the wine in several chalices for the reception of the Precious Blood by concelebrating priests and vested deacons.** Social distancing should be maintained at a minimum of six feet. There must not be multiple masses of the Lord's Supper celebrated by individual priests at the same parish.
- There is to be no Eucharistic procession after Holy Communion, instead the Eucharist should be reserved in the Tabernacle immediately after the closing prayer in the usual way. **The final blessing and dismissal must not be given following the prayer after communion.** Priests who are unable to celebrate or concelebrate the Mass of the Lord's

Supper and deacons who are unable to participate at Mass, and who are not dispensed because of sickness or infirmity, are reminded that they are **obligated to pray Evening Prayer (Vespers) of the Liturgy of the Hours for Holy Thursday.**

### **Good Friday: The Passion of the Lord**

- Priests are reminded that by liturgical law the presiding at this service **must never be delegated** to a deacon.
- The time of this liturgy should be at 3:00 PM since a later time is granted usually out of the pastoral need of many faithful who are unable to attend at 3:00 PM because of work.
- Whenever possible this liturgy should be live streamed so that the faithful can join themselves to it in prayer. For the same reason, the time of the liturgy, that is, 3:00 PM, is to be published in the bulletin and on parish websites.
- The Gospel is to be proclaimed by the deacon or priest in its entirety and not in the customary practice of a dialogue with distinct speakers and parts. For the Adoration of the Holy Cross, the priest alone may kiss the cross. If there is a deacon and/or acolyte present the adoration should be made without touching the Cross, with a genuflection, prostration, or a profound bow.
- The Roman Missal says that the Diocesan bishop may “permit or order the addition of a special intention” to the Solemn Intercessions. In solidarity with the other dioceses across the United States of America and in communion with the Holy See, I am asking you to add the following as the eleventh petition to the liturgy of Good Friday:

XI. For an end to the pandemic

Let us pray, dearly beloved, for a swift end to the coronavirus pandemic that afflicts our world, that our God and Father will heal the sick, strengthen those who care for them, and help us all to persevere in faith.

Prayer in silence. Then the Priest says:

Almighty and merciful God, source of all life, health and healing, look with compassion on our world, brought low by disease; protect us in the midst of the grave challenges that assail us and in your fatherly providence grant recovery to the stricken, strength to those who care for them, and success to those working to eradicate this scourge. Through Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

- Priests and deacons who are unable to be present at the celebration of the Lord’s Passion are reminded that they are **obligated to pray Evening Prayer (Vespers) of the Liturgy of the Hours for Good Friday** unless they are dispensed because of infirmity or sickness.

### **The Easter Vigil**

- During this time of “shelter in place” or “stay at home” priests must celebrate Mass without a congregation and/or with a server or deacon present. Lectors and cantor may be added only for the Easter Vigil Mass. **NO MORE THAN 10 PEOPLE ARE TO BE PRESENT INCLUDING PRIEST CELEBRANT, CONCELEBRANTS, VESTED DEACONS, CANTOR, SERVERS AND LECTORS. SOCIAL DISTANCING OF A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET MUST BE MAINTAINED.**
- **To avoid the spread of the virus priests must consecrate the wine in several chalices for the reception of the Precious Blood by concelebrating priests and vested deacons.**
- There must not be more than one Easter Vigil celebrated in each parish.
- The time for beginning the celebration of the Easter Vigil is **no earlier than 8:30 PM.** This time must be publicized on websites and in bulletins.
- The preparation and lighting of the Easter Fire and procession with the Paschal Candle is omitted and must not be done.
- At the beginning of the Liturgy, the Paschal candle is lit and the Exultet is sung or prayerfully recited by the deacon or cantor.
- The Liturgy of the Word follows: ***“At least three readings should be read from the Old Testament, both from the Law and from the Prophets, and their respective Responsorial Psalms should be sung. Never, moreover, should the reading of chapter 14 of Exodus with its Canticle be omitted.” (RM, Easter Vigil, #21)***
- Since there are to be no sacraments of initiation to be celebrated, it is suggested that this might be a rare opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of salvation history with the people by including *all* of the readings provided by the Church in the Roman Missal for the Celebration of the Easter Vigil. This would be especially true wherever the Easter Vigil is to be live streamed for parishioners.
- Since no one is to be baptized at the Easter Vigil this year and the font is not to be blessed, the Litany of Saints is to be omitted, and the Blessing of Water takes place at once (see Roman Missal, Easter Vigil, #42, see also Roman Missal #54). The Renewal of Baptismal promises takes place following the blessing of water (Roman Missal #55) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist follows.
- The RCIA includes provision for a delay in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation from Easter for a good reason. I am asking that the celebration of these sacraments take



place at an extended **Vigil of Pentecost on May 30, 2020** (which is included in the Roman Missal). For your convenience Deacon Warner will send you a form of the Extended Pentecost Vigil with Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

- Priests and deacons are reminded that Night Prayer from Sunday after Evening Prayer II from the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed only by those who do not participate in the Easter Vigil.
- Priests and deacons are reminded that the Easter Vigil takes the place of the Office of Readings from the Liturgy of the Hours for Easter Sunday. Priests and deacons who do not participate at the Easter Vigil are obligated to pray the Office of Readings unless dispensed because of sickness or infirmity.

### **Easter Sunday**

- The above adaptations and norms for the celebration of Sunday Mass during the current pandemic apply to the celebration of Easter Sunday Mass.

I repeat my gratitude and affectionate esteem for each of you who are faithfully striving to continue the necessary and ongoing mission of salvation entrusted to the Church and in an essential and ministerial way to us as priests by our Lord, Jesus Christ. I renew my encouragement for each of us to grow ever more faithful in our respective vocations for the pastoral care of the faithful entrusted to us by Christ. Let our confidence not rest in our will power or talents but only in the unconditional love of our Lord Jesus Christ who never abandons us. With every good wish and prayers for you I remain,

Fraternally Yours in Christ,

*+ Michael F. Olson*

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA  
Bishop of Fort Worth

*E. James Hart*

Reverend Msgr. E. James Hart  
Chancellor

