



*Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Saint Cloud*

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March 17, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

After much prayer and consultation with members of my staff, and in light of the latest recommendations from state and federal health authorities for slowing the rapid spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and protecting the people of our communities, I have made the difficult decision to suspend all public weekday and weekend Masses in the Diocese of Saint Cloud, effective immediately through Easter Monday, April 13. All Catholics in the diocese remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this time.

Further:

- I will celebrate the Chrism Mass privately with the deans. They will distribute the holy oils to the parishes in their deaneries at a later time. We hope to livestream the Mass on our diocesan Facebook page.
- Baptisms should be rescheduled. If a wedding needs to take place, a dispensation needs to be granted by the bishop. Funeral Masses during this time are prohibited; only graveside services are allowed. A memorial Mass should be scheduled for a later date after April 13.
- Confirmations during this time period remain cancelled. My office will contact parishes to reschedule.
- All public Holy Week liturgies, including Good Friday services, are cancelled. For specific details regarding liturgies, pastors should consult the "Liturgical Guidelines During the Time of Suspension of Masses" provided by the diocesan Office of Worship.
- Our churches will remain open for prayer and the sacrament of reconciliation on a schedule determined by the pastor. Social distancing should be encouraged — at least 6 feet between people in prayer and/or waiting to receive the sacrament.
- All parish events of 50 people or more should be cancelled, per the guidelines of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This includes parish breakfasts and fish fries; drive-through and pick-up options only are acceptable. People who are at a higher risk for contracting the illness — the elderly and those with underlying health conditions — should avoid gatherings of 10 or more people.

- If any changes to this approach are warranted in the next few weeks, I will notify pastors.

While the threat in your community may not be readily visible, it is very real. I believe these steps are necessary during this national emergency to protect human life and uphold the common good — two foundational principles of Catholic social teaching. While it may seem counterintuitive, we stay in solidarity with one another at this time by staying apart.

This outbreak has caused much fear and anxiety, and I share those same feelings. I haven't experienced anything like this in my 50 years of priesthood. But we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus never leaves our side. He offers us the grace we need to make our way through this present challenge. "Take courage," he reminds us. "It is I; do not be afraid" (Matthew 14:27).

The measures we are taking don't mean that we will stop providing pastoral care. My staff and I are committed to helping our parishes and the people of our diocese navigate through this crisis. It will require everyone — diocesan staff, pastors, lay staff and volunteers, parishioners of all ages — to be creative in how we might offer alternative prayer and faith enrichment opportunities, particularly during Holy Week. We must work to make Christ present in other ways in our homes and through our charitable efforts.

I encourage you — individually or as a family — to read and pray over the Sunday Scripture readings and watch our diocesan TV Mass. It is available online at <http://worship.stcdio.org/tv-mass>, where you will also find a list of channels on which it airs. My staff is working on additional prayer and faith formation opportunities that could be offered online during this holy season. These will be publicized in various ways, including on the diocesan website: www.stcdio.org.

I ask that you also take time to check in — by phone, email or social media — with family members, friends and neighbors, particularly those who are most vulnerable, to ensure they are well and have what they need. Please also continue to support your parish financially during this time. Parishes rely on your generosity to support their staff and ministries, and they need this support now more than ever.

Finally, please join me in praying for all those affected by this pandemic — those who are ill, their caregivers, health care workers, and public officials. We will get through this by patiently making sacrifices, loving our neighbor, and staying close to Christ in prayer. May this time without the celebration of the Eucharist instill in us an even greater appreciation for those times when we will again be gathered, nourished and sent.

I share with you the prayer that Archbishop Jose Gomez, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, recently shared, seeking the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe:

*Holy Virgin of Guadalupe,
Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.
We fly to you today as your beloved children.
We ask you to intercede for us with your Son,
as you did at the wedding in Cana.*

*Pray for us, loving Mother,
and gain for our nation and world,
and for all our families and loved ones,
the protection of your holy angels,
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.*

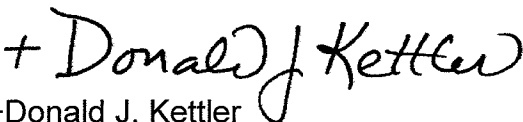
*For those already afflicted,
we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance.
Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful,
wipe away their tears and help them to trust.*

*In this time of trial and testing,
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.*

*We come to you with confidence,
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,
health of the sick and cause of our joy.*

*Shelter us under the mantle of your protection,
keep us in the embrace of your arms,
help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

Sincerely yours in Christ,


+Donald J. Kettler
Bishop of Saint Cloud

Liturgical Guidelines During the Time of Suspension of Masses

Daily/Sunday Masses

In 1999, Pope John Paul II, in his “Holy Thursday Address” said,

“In the Eucharist, the priest personally draws near to the inexhaustible mystery of Christ and of His prayer to the Father. He can immerse himself daily in the mystery of redemption and grace by celebrating Holy Mass, which retains its meaning and value even when, for a just reason, it is offered without the participation of the faithful, yet always for the faithful and for the whole world” (#6).

Keeping these words in mind, priests are encouraged to celebrate Mass daily either alone or with his brother priests from a given Area Catholic Community. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is of utmost importance during this time of uncertainty. Priests are encouraged to find ways to broadcast the Mass so their flock, for whom they are responsible, may be ever reminded of the richness of Sacred Scripture and of the Eucharist itself.

If celebrating the Holy Mass, every attempt should be made for at least one assisting minister to be present (i.e. Deacon, server, one of the faithful, etc.). Guidelines for *MASS AT WHICH ONLY ONE MINISTER PARTICIPATES* are laid out in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* nos. 252-272. In no. 254, we read, “Mass should not be celebrated without a minister, or at least one of the faithful, except for just and reasonable cause. In this case, the greetings, the instructions, and the blessing at the end of Mass are omitted.” Should pastors decide not to celebrate the Mass daily, he is asked to celebrate, at a minimum, Sunday Mass.

Funerals

Funerals are not permitted. Clergy are asked not to participate in wake services. All funeral services should be graveside services ONLY. Memorial Masses are to be scheduled as soon as possible after April 13, 2020.

Weddings

Weddings are not permitted without dispensation from the Bishop.

Anointing of the Sick

There are to be no communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick.

Confirmation

All celebrations of Confirmation have been cancelled through April 18, 2020 and will be rescheduled.

First Holy Communion

There are to be no celebrations of First Holy Communion until the weekend of April 18/19, 2020.

Reconciliation

Individual Reconciliation may be scheduled at the discretion of the pastor. There are to be no communal services.

Chrism Mass

The Chrism Mass will be celebrated privately with the Bishop and Deans. All Holy Oils will be distributed by the Deans.

Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

The Bishop has dispensed the Elect from two of the three scrutinies. Therefore, if you celebrated the First Scrutiny, as prescribed for the Third Sunday of Lent, the two remaining scrutinies are dispensed. If, however, you have not celebrated at least one scrutiny, a time should be established for the Elect and, if possible, at least one godparent (recommended no more than 10 persons at one gathering) to gather with the priest. The following outline is to be used:

- Liturgy of the Word: Using the Gospel for either the Fourth or Fifth Week of Lent
- A brief homily
- Invitation to Silent Prayer
- Intercessions for the Elect
- Exorcism
- Dismissal

A sample text is provided on the Office of Worship website under RCIA.

For the Sacraments of Initiation, a later date and time should be scheduled during a Sunday Mass for these celebrations to take place. The rituals for *Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation*, as set forth in the RCIA, should be followed.

A sample text is provided on the Office of Worship website under RCIA.

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Private Mass Only. The *Third Form: The Simple Entrance* should be utilized.

Holy Thursday: Mass of the Lord's Supper

Private Mass ONLY. *The Washing of the Feet* would be omitted. The Most Blessed Sacrament should still be removed from the tabernacle and brought of a place of repose. Bishop Kettler is asking all priests to spend an extended period of time in prayer and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament praying especially for the unity of the whole Church and for the safety and health of all people.

Good Friday

Private Service ONLY. During the time appointed for *The Adoration of the Holy Cross*, Bishop Kettler is asking all priests to spend an extended period of time in prayer.

The Easter Vigil

The Bishop is dispensing all priests from celebrating the Easter Vigil. He is asking all priests to spend time reflecting on and with the Sacred Scriptures prescribed for the Easter Vigil. *The Blessing of the Fire and Preparation of the Candle* is to take place at the first Mass or first Sunday Mass after Easter using an adapted text (provided on the Office of Worship website and will be sent to all pastors). *The Easter Proclamation* is omitted. The Entrance Procession takes place as is usual for Mass with the Priest Celebrant carrying the Paschal Candle to its place. Mass continues with the *Sprinkling Rite*.

Note: Pastors may elect to prepare the Paschal Candle privately.

Easter Sunday

Private Mass ONLY. In place of the Penitential Act, the priest blesses the water, using the *Rite for the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water* (Appendix II). Pastors may find it pastorally beneficial to utilize the *Renewal of Baptismal Promises* at all Masses celebrated on the weekend following Easter.

Note: Pastors may elect to bless the water privately.

Other Thoughts

Holy Week

Bishop Kettler will be celebrating the liturgies of Holy Thursday and Good Friday in private. These will either be pre-recorded and made available to the public or they may be live streamed. It is our intent to encourage ritual actions to take place in the home during these broadcasts. Families will be encouraged to join the Bishop in prayer and, at the appointed times, to wash each other's feet and to venerate a cross from their home. Further information will be provided in the coming days.

Spiritual Communion

Pastors may elect to communicate to their parishioners how to make a *Spiritual Communion*.

Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches because you have revealed them who are eternal truth and wisdom, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. In this faith I intend to live and die. Amen.

Prayers excerpted from the **Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church**. . . ,
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Eucharistic Adoration

This devotion is encouraged to continue in all parishes, especially those with perpetual adoration already established in their communities. Please take all the necessary precautions to ensure only one or two people are present at any one time.