

In light of the government's advice asking for social distancing and reducing the number of public gatherings, the following letter was issued on 18th March by the President and Vice-President, on behalf of all the Bishops of the Conference.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, so many aspects of our lives must change. This includes the ways in which we publicly express our faith. It is very clear that, following official advice and in order to keep each other safe, save lives and support the NHS, at this time we must not gather for public acts of worship in our churches. This will begin from Friday evening, 20th March 2020, until further notice.

Our churches will remain open. They are not closing. They will be a focal point of prayer, where you will find solace and strength. In visiting our churches at this time, we will observe with great care the practices of hygiene and the guidance on social distancing.

However, the celebration of Mass, Sunday by Sunday and day by day, will take place without a public congregation.

Knowing that the Mass is being celebrated; joining in spiritually in that celebration; watching the live-streaming of the Mass; following its prayers at home; making an act of spiritual communion: this is how we share in the Sacrifice of Christ in these days. These are the ways in which we will sanctify Sunday, and indeed every day.

We want everyone to understand that 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.

You will find more details about the pathway of prayer and sacramental life we are now to take in the accompanying document and on the Bishops' Conference website. Your own bishop and parish priest will provide further support, encouragement and information about our way of prayer together in the coming weeks.

The second vital aspect of these challenging times is our care for each other. There are so many ways in which we are to do this: being attentive to the needs of our neighbour, especially the elderly and vulnerable; contributing to our local food banks; volunteering for charitable initiatives and organisations; simply keeping in touch by all the means open to us.

During these disturbing and threatening times, the rhythm of the prayer of the Church will continue. Please play your part in it. The effort of daily kindness and mutual support for all will continue and increase. Please play your part in this too. For your commitment to this, we thank you.

'The Lord is my shepherd,
There is nothing I shall want.'
May God bless us all.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

President of the Bishops' Conference

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon

Vice-President of the Bishops' Conference

When Mass cannot be celebrated publicly

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? :
the Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

These words from Psalm 26 were penned by David in the twilight of his life. Having experienced many ups and downs as King of Israel, he reflects on the one steadfast thing, the love of God for him. In these difficult times when our worlds can seem to be upside down and the familiar patterns of life are removed from us, we turn to God and rely on his mercy and loving compassion for us all. This booklet has been provided as a help for prayer when Mass is not available to us. Our priests will continue to offer Mass for the Church and the world at this time, and we can unite ourselves to their celebrations through a spiritual communion. St Thomas Aquinas described Spiritual Communion as, 'an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the most holy sacrament and lovingly embrace him'. As our pattern of life changes, we should endeavour to keep a pattern of prayer and praise in our days, and this is one way we can unite ourselves in prayer to our Lord and his world. Be assured of my prayers for you all at this time.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
President
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Introduction

Some will find it helpful to have a space as a focus for their prayer. This might include a crucifix, icon or other holy image, and a lighted candle.

Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Examen

Before listening to the Word of God take a moment to reflect.

For what am I grateful to God for today?

Where did I stray from God: through words, actions or things I did not do

How might I do better tomorrow?

What grace do I ask from God in order to live more closely in his love.

You may wish to conclude by saying:

Lord Jesus, you have revealed yourself as the way to the Father:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

You have poured out on your people the Spirit of truth:

Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.

You are the Good Shepherd, leading us to eternal life:

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

The Word of God

The readings for the Mass of the Day can be found in a People's Missal or online Universalis [<https://universalis.com/mass.htm>]. Either read all the texts or choose just to read the Gospel of the Day.

Psalm 85

(1-6, 11, 15-16)

Turn your ear, O Lord, and give answer
for I am poor and needy.
Preserve my life, for I am faithful:
save the servant who trusts in you.
You are my God, have mercy on me, Lord,
for I cry to you all the day long.
Give joy to your servant, O Lord, for to you I lift up my soul.
O Lord, you are good and forgiving,
full of love to all who call.
Give heed, O Lord, to my prayer
and attend to the sound of my voice.
Show me, Lord, your way
so that I may walk in your truth.
Guide my heart to fear your name.
You, God of mercy and compassion,
slow to anger, O Lord,
abounding in love and truth,
turn and take pity on me.

Gospel

Mark

4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Silent reflection

Pause for a moment of silent reflection.

Prayers

Intercessions

Pray for family and loved ones so that they may be held in God's compassionate care. Pray for other countries who are struggling with the effects of the COVID 19 virus.

If the following intentions are said in a family or other group you may wish to conclude each one with the response:

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer

For those in authority:

may they offer advice with care and integrity,
may they seek to protect the poor and vulnerable.

For all who work in healthcare:

give strength to all who look after the sick
so that they may bring comfort and relief to the suffering.

For the Church:

may she offer prayers and consolation for all those affected.

For our local community and all for those in need:

may those who are isolated know the support
and service of their neighbours.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father...

Spiritual Communion

Prayer of St Alphonsus

My Jesus,

I believe that you are present in this Holy Sacrament of the altar.

I love you above all things

and I passionately desire to receive you into my soul.

Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,

come spiritually into my soul

so that I may unite myself wholly to you now and forever.

Amen.

Conclusion

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Additional Prayers

Pope Francis' prayer to the Virgin for protection

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey
as a sign of salvation and hope.

We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick.

At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain,
with steadfast faith.

You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need.

We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee,
joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,

to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us:

He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us:
through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God.

Do not despise our pleas — we who are put to the test —
and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Invocation of Our Lady

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,

that never was it known

that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help,
or sought your intercession was left unaided.

Inspired with this confidence,

I fly to you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.

To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate,

despise not my petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer me.

Prayer for the Household

Hear us, Lord, and send your angel from heaven

to visit and protect, to comfort and defend

all who live in this house. Amen.