

My Dear Friends,

The circumstances surrounding the Coronavirus (COVID-19) are ever developing, which means the Church's pastoral response is likewise ever-developing. This morning we received the following two new pastoral provisions from Bishop Arthur Serratelli, the bishop of the Diocese of Paterson (Sussex, Passaic and Morris Counties):

In light of the danger of the risk of contagion associated with the coronavirus (COVID-019), the sick, the elderly and those vulnerable through special health concerns and underlying conditions, are dispensed from the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass until further notice. Mass will continue to be celebrated in all our parishes and institutions.

And,

Because of the risk of spreading the coronavirus, the faithful of the Diocese of Paterson may legitimately choose not to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. Those who choose to attend are urged to use caution and prudence through appropriate social distancing.

What does this mean? Firstly, just as I said in my email yesterday, that those who are sick, have pre-existing health concerns or are considered especially vulnerable to contracting the Coronavirus can be dispensed of the Sunday obligation – well, now they are.

Secondly, due to the risk of spreading the coronavirus one can legitimately choose to not attend Sunday Mass until further notice. However, this requires there being a real risk of spreading the coronavirus and not mere fear. If one is simply afraid of contracting the Coronavirus, I do not see this as sufficient cause for not fulfilling the Sunday Obligation of attending Mass, especially in light of all the preventative and cautionary measures that have been and can be taken, including not actually receiving the Eucharist but making an act of spiritual communion. Whereas, if your concern is due to pre-existing health issues, vulnerability due to advanced age or health conditions, then your concern is truly legitimate and, as was stated above, the dispensation properly applies. Fear, alone, is never a proper motivation to act. And, the greatest gift of love, which conquers fear, is the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Love, and spiritual nourishment that will bring us peace, clarity of thought and consolation at this time of societal unrest.

When Pope Francis became pope, seven years ago today, he referred to the Church as a “field hospital” on a battleground caring for the sick and the weary. In light of Pope Francis's own pastoral charge given to priests and to the Church universal, now above all, is not the time to close churches, cancel Masses and deny the face of Christ to those who are dealing with fear and anxiety, and most especially anyone who becomes ill. What other parishes and diocese do is the result of their pastoral leadership and one must wonder the motivation of any shepherd who closes a church at a time when Jesus is most in need. Bishop Serratelli rightly exhorts us: “I ask all the faithful to join together in prayer, especially to our Blessed Mother, that the Lord deliver us from this present danger.” Further, as bishop said: “Mass will continue to be celebrated in all our parishes and institutions.” Below, please find the prayer written by Pope Francis to protect us from the Coronavirus.

Our parish is open, and our parish will remain open to those who seek the consolation of Jesus Christ. Again, I look forward to celebrating St. Patrick's Day at our St. Patrick's Dinner this coming Saturday after the Sunday Vigil Mass. I look forward to attending tonight's Stations of the Cross at 7 pm which will be led by our brilliant young people from our Religious Education program. I also look forward to seeing all those who are not sick or vulnerable at our Sunday Masses!

Sts. Sebastian and Rocco, patrons who protected us during previous plagues and illnesses, pray for your Church and the World now!

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Philip-Michael F. Tangorra

Pope Francis' Prayer to Mary for Protection and Help

“O Mary, you always shine on our path as a sign of salvation and of hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick, who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm. You...know what we need, and we are sure you will provide so that, as in Cana of Galilee, we may return to joy and to feasting after this time of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform to the will of the Father and to do as we are told by Jesus, who has taken upon himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows to lead us, through the cross, to the joy of the resurrection. Amen. Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of those of us who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.”