



Letter of the Bishop to the faithful before Holy Week and Easter

Dear brothers and sisters,

Peace be with you! Until a few weeks ago, most of us could not imagine that the Covid-19 pandemic would affect our lives in the dramatic way it has done so far. I do not wish to repeat what I wrote to you at the beginning of the pandemic when things became serious. Many of us are passing through moments of anxiety and distress due to the present circumstances. With this letter I just want to tell you that I can understand your pain and grief during this time of worldwide crisis. Although we, the Bishop and the priests, cannot be close to you in the usual way, we can still spiritually reach out to you. Actually, we bring not only your sufferings and pains, but also your hopes and anxieties before God every day while offering the sacrifice of the Mass in the Cathedral and the parish churches.

There are many of us who would like to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before Easter, which is unfortunately not possible in the present situation. However, let us keep in mind: Whenever anyone of you calls on *the Name of Jesus* with the intention of sincerely repenting and asking for a change of heart, confessing to God and renouncing your sins, the Church, in the given circumstances, drawing from the treasures of the merciful Saviour, reaches out to you with assurance of forgiveness.

Whenever your conscience is burdening you, I invite you to pray in confidence the words of Psalm 103:8-14,

*“The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him,
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.”*

Put your full trust in Him who does not abandon us. Be assured of my prayers and closeness.

I am sure that you will miss the participation in the usual liturgical and devotional celebrations during the Holy Week and Easter. Although the celebrations will be accessible on livestream, it will never be the “live” experience within the physically present faith-community. However, at this moment there will be no other choice. First of all, do not forget that during this period of staying at home you are not forsaken by God. He is present wherever you are. Wherever



possible, pray together in the family; read the Word of God together; pray the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, rediscover the value of prayer before and after the meals as a family liturgy! And above all, do not lose sight on the needs of others, who may be suffering much more than yourselves. Keep in mind Jesus, who amidst his passion was glancing at Simon Peter and touching his heart; while hanging on the Cross was also taking care of his mother and confiding her to his beloved disciple; who was forgiving his torturers before passing to the Father, and was opening an everlasting perspective to the criminal hanging at his right.

In order to remain connected to the community of faith, use the electronic means. Most of our parishes will let you know, if and when you can join the celebrations of the Holy Week and Easter through the online media. We shall do what is possible on our part to make accessible the simplified but full liturgy in our Cathedral in Abu Dhabi. You will find the details on our website (www.avosa.org) and also here attached. There will also be made available other spiritual inputs on the websites of the Vicariate and of our parishes. Do not forget the website of the Vatican (www.vaticannews.va) where you can follow the liturgy with Pope Francis and listen to his homilies. I recommend, for all those possible, to follow the online retreat, which will be given by Fr. Darick D'souza (Bishop's House) on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the Holy Week which will be made available on the Vicariate website.

As we prepare to enter into Holy Week during a time which is marked by suffering and paralysis of normal life brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic, may it draw all of us together in solidarity with all those throughout the world who are suffering. Let us once again keep in our prayers in a special way those who are on the frontlines: the governments, the healthcare workers, and those who work in other critical life supporting systems.

The mysteries of these days assure us in a special way that God does not abandon humanity in the grip of sin which ends in death. On the other hand, they once again remind us of the Good News that God the Father has loved us and has washed away our sins through the Blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, who has risen from the dead to be with us always, even in the midst of our trials and sufferings. He assures us that *"no trial shall come upon us which is beyond our strength; but with every trial, He will also provide us a way out by enabling us to put up with it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Let us not hesitate to draw near to the Lord Jesus who died and rose for us. Take Our Lady as guide who did not run away but persevered at the foot of the cross. Equally, we continue to be faithful to Him in the midst of our trials. He empowers us to rise again to new life with Him on Easter singing "Christ has risen from the dead, he is no longer subject to death, alleluia!"

May Lord bless and keep all of you and your families.

Abu Dhabi, 31st March 2020

+ Paul Hinder

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