Church Closures Deny Natural and Constitutional Right to Worship

Most Rev. Salvatore J. Cordileone
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Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone reacts to today's announcements of a return to restrictions that included no congregations for worship inside churches in two of the three counties that comprise the Archdiocese, effective noon tomorrow:

"After weeks of demonstrating we can celebrate the Mass safely, the state of California has put San Francisco and San Mateo Counties into the purple tier, which bans indoor worship altogether. The order lumps religious worship with non-essential indoor activities such as gyms, movie theaters, and museums. At the same time, the health order allows for indoor retail at 25 percent capacity and permits massage parlors, hair and nail salons, and tattoo parlors to operate indoors.

"This is precisely the kind of blatant discrimination to which the Supreme Court gave injunctive relief in New York. The government is demoting worship to the same status as watching a movie: 'non-essential.' But worship is both a natural and a Constitutional right. My people want to receive the Body and Blood of Christ; they need it, and have every right to be free to do so.

"Catholics in San Francisco are absolutely committed to public safety in conducting worship services. Our protocols require masks, social distancing, sanitation and ventilation. But the government still chooses to treat worship as less important than shopping for shoes.

"While the safety protocols of the Archdiocese have served us well and we know of no cases of transmission of the virus as a result of in-person worship inside of our churches, I am also deeply sympathetic to public health concerns about a surge in COVID hospitalizations. In order to discern what our faith and responsible citizenship call us to do at this time, then, I will confer with my brother bishops, review our safety protocols with infectious disease specialists, and consult with the lawyers on the legal options we have available."

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