

Holy Week Guidelines for 2020

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impediments placed upon churches that limit the communal celebration of the liturgy, it is necessary to make adaptations to the Holy Week liturgies. The following guidelines are based on the current restrictions in Nebraska limiting public gatherings to no more than 10 people. If the civil authorities issue different guidelines, then further adaptations may be necessary. Following the directives of the Holy See and the USCCB, the following are general guidelines for Holy Week to help priests adapt to the present circumstances:

1. **Concerning the Date of Easter.** Easter is the heart of the entire liturgical year and is not simply one feast among others. The Easter Triduum is celebrated over the arc of three days which is preceded by Lent and crowned by Pentecost and, therefore, cannot be transferred to another time. The liturgies of the Easter Triduum are to be celebrated at their proper times. In the Diocese of Lincoln, the Easter Vigil shall not begin before 8:30 P.M. in Central Time and 8:00 P.M. in Mountain Time.
2. **Easter Baptisms/Receptions into Full Communion.** The Easter Vigil liturgy is the normal time to baptize catechumens who have completed the RCIA process. In light of the current restrictions limiting public gatherings to no more than 10 people, pastors may need to either postpone or schedule private ceremonies for baptisms of catechumens. Any time during the Easter season would be an appropriate time to baptize catechumens. Priests can also receive into full communion previously baptized persons at any convenient date at the pastor's discretion, provided the public guidelines are followed limiting gatherings to no more than 10 people.
3. **Palm Sunday.** The Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem is to be celebrated within sacred buildings; the third form given in the Roman Missal should be used. Palm branches may be blessed and made available at a later time for families to pick up and take home. They could be left at a convenient spot, so that people can access them safely. Pastors may want to direct parishioners to sources whereby they could read the Passion at home.
4. **The Chrism Mass.** The Holy See gives the local bishop the faculty to postpone the Chrism Mass to a later date. In the Diocese of Lincoln this year the Chrism Mass and the annual Jubilarian Banquet are postponed with the hope that it will be able to be celebrated in full at a later date.
5. **Holy Oils.** Since the Chrism Mass will not be celebrated at the normal time, priests should continue to use their current oil stocks until new oils have been blessed and consecrated. If a priest's oil stock runs dry, the chancery does have a limited supply available. Please contact Fr. Daniel Rayer, Msgr. Mark Huber, or Fr. Eric Clark. A reminder that in case of necessity, canon law (cf. can. 999) provides that any priest, but only in the actual celebration of the sacrament, may bless the Oil of the Sick. A priest should normally use olive oil, but an oil derived from plants similar to olive oil is also permitted. The prayer of blessing of the Oil of the Sick can be found within the Rite of Anointing of the Sick in the *Pastoral Care of the Sick* (cf. #123). The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (cf. #102) provides a prayer for a priest to bless the Oil of Catechumens should a priest need to do so.
6. **Holy Thursday.** On this day the faculty to celebrate Mass in a suitable place, without the presence of the people, is exceptionally granted to all priests. The washing of feet, which is already optional, is to be omitted. At the end of the Mass, the procession is also omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle. At the pastor's discretion, and if local circumstances allow, pastors may prepare for people to pray before the tabernacle after Mass. A sign up system should be prepared ahead of time with adoration times so that there are no more than 10 people present at a time. Priests who are unable to celebrate Mass should instead pray Vespers of the day.

7. **Good Friday.** In Cathedral and parish churches, and chapels of seminaries and religious communities, where and in the measure that there is a real possibility of doing so, established by the one responsible, the Bishop/Parish Priest will celebrate the Passion of the Lord. For the Adoration of the Holy Cross, if more than one person is assisting, it will be best to express reverence to the Cross without kissing or touching it. A genuflection or profound bow would be appropriate.

Priests are asked to add the following prayer to the Good Friday Solemn Intercessions:

XI. For an end to the pandemic

**Let us pray, dearly beloved, for a swift end
to the coronavirus pandemic that afflicts our world,
that our God and Father will heal the sick,
strengthen those who care for them,
and help us all to persevere in faith.**

Prayer in silence. Then the Priest says:

**Almighty and merciful God,
source of all life, health and healing,
look with compassion on our world, brought low by disease;
protect us in the midst of the grave challenges that assail us
and in your fatherly providence
grant recovery to the stricken,
strength to those who care for them,
and success to those working to eradicate this scourge.
Through Christ our Lord.**

R. Amen.

8. **Easter Vigil.** The Easter Vigil is to be celebrated only in Cathedral and parish churches, and in the chapels of seminaries and religious communities, where and in the measure that there is a real possibility of doing so, established by the one responsible.
- a) At “The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium” the preparation and lighting of the fire is omitted, the Paschal Candle is lit, the procession is omitted, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) follows. (However, if priests who celebrate the Vigil in common would prefer to celebrate these portions of the Solemn Beginning, they may do so.)
 - b) The “Liturgy of the Word” then takes place.
 - c) For the “Baptismal Liturgy” the “Renewal of Baptismal Promises” alone is necessary (cf. *Roman Missal*, n. 55).
 - d) The Liturgy of the Eucharist” then follows.

Those who have absolutely no possibility of uniting themselves to the Paschal Vigil celebrated in a church should pray the Office of Readings for Easter Sunday.

9. **Easter Sunday.** An idea for pastors to create an opportunity to visit with their people is to provide a time when families could come to the parish, and priests could be present to give each family an Easter blessing from a safe distance. They could also ask the family to renew their baptismal promises and then be sprinkled with the newly blessed Easter holy water. If families can’t come, they could be encouraged to renew their baptismal promises together as a family at home.

Sacramental Guidelines

Anointing of the Sick. When administering the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick in this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is an acceptable and recommended practice to wear plastic gloves. Be sure to use a separate glove for each of the two anointings, or use a different gloved finger for each anointing. This prevents the Oil of the Sick from becoming contaminated by the contagion. After the anointing, as there will be holy oil on the gloves, turn them inside out, take them with you, and burn them at a convenient time. If there is any danger that the Oil of the Sick has been contaminated, burn the oil and the cotton in which it is soaked, and wash the oil stock with chlorine bleach. It is better to be safe than to take the risk of spreading the contamination.

A reminder that the instructions in the *Pastoral Care of the Sick* indicate, “in case of necessity, it is sufficient that a single anointing be given on the forehead or, because of the particular condition of the sick person, on another suitable part of the body, while the whole sacramental form is said.”

At this time, most hospitals and nursing homes are restricting the access of visitors to their facilities. If there is a danger of death situation, priests will need to contact the medical facility and request to follow their protocol, which will likely include wearing an anti-viral mask, goggles, gloves, etc. Please be aware, that the medical facility may need to burn, destroy, or decontaminate anything exposed. It might be a good idea to pour some blessed oil on a cotton ball to take with the priest so that he doesn't get his oil stock contaminated or confiscated by the medical facility. It would be a good idea to make a photocopy of the anointing ritual so that the priest's ritual book is not confiscated.

Priests who would be considered in a high risk category – i.e., those who have underlying medical conditions, compromised immunity, or are elderly – should avoid visiting people in hospitals or nursing homes if possible. It is recommended that another younger and healthier priest make these visits.

Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals. As was announced previously, baptisms, weddings, and funerals may still be celebrated, but they are limited to a total of 10 persons present. In the baptism liturgy, the *Ephphatha* Rite is optional. This should be omitted, so as not to touch the child's mouth.

More on Weddings. Priests should encourage couples to go through with their scheduled weddings. Because of the sacred nature of marriage as a Sacrament, weddings should still be celebrated in the sacred setting of a church, although, because of the current guidelines, in a more simplified form with no more than 10 people present. Because of the extraordinary circumstances that we are in, at the pastor's discretion, the couple may have a second more public ceremony at a later date once the restrictions on public gatherings is lifted. This ceremony could include a bridal procession along with bridesmaids and groomsmen. Priests could celebrate a Mass and use the ritual in Appendix III of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* or the “Order for the Blessing of a Married Couple” found at #90 in the *Book of Blessings*. It is important to note that the essential matter and form of the sacrament of matrimony – the mutual exchange of consent between the man and woman – only takes place at the original marriage ceremony. The formula for the exchange of consent in the wedding ritual should not be repeated at a second ceremony. The second ceremony is a blessing of the marital consent already made and so the formula in Appendix III of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* or the prayers in the *Book of Blessings* should be used. Although the ritual in Appendix III and the *Book of Blessings* are designed for a couple's wedding anniversary, they may be adapted for the current extraordinary situation and used even if it is not their actual wedding anniversary.

Forgiveness of Sins During the Pandemic

A crucial aspect of the spiritual life is the forgiveness of sins, which is ordinarily accomplished through individual and integral confession to a priest followed by individual absolution. The current pandemic and the measures taken to combat it make this very difficult. Priests are encouraged to make confessions available for the individual celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation while adopting prudent safety precautions such as:

- Confessions should not be heard in the standard confessional, but in well-ventilated areas such as outdoors, in a large room, or other open-air spaces.
- They should be scheduled in such a way that groups do not congregate.
- Parishes may need to consider using an usher to help manage crowds.
- Priests may consider using protective gear such as face masks.

The Holy See has instructed that the diocesan bishop can, in the current situation, determine that the circumstances in his territory warrant the use of the third form of the Rite of Penance, often called “general absolution.” However, this form necessitates a gathering of people. Given restrictions on public gatherings, this may not be practical or possible. At this time, general absolution has not been authorized in the Diocese of Lincoln. If it is determined that this may be necessary, this will be communicated to the priests.

Because of the given public restrictions, the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation with either individual or general absolution may not always be possible. This will make some of the faithful anxious, especially during this Lenten season of penance. To help in this, the Holy See, through the Apostolic Penitentiary, has offered two recourses for the faithful:

1. **Perfect Contrition.** Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by *votum confessionis*, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452).

Perfect contrition requires:

- The love of God
- The sincere desire for forgiveness
- The ardent commitment to receive the sacrament of reconciliation when available.

2. **Indulgences.** The gift of special Indulgences is granted to the faithful suffering from Covid-19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.

➤ This is a time of suffering, especially for those who have contracted Covid-19. As such, it may be a time for us to “rediscover ‘the same redemptive suffering of Christ’ (*Salvifici doloris*, 30).” Trusting in Christ,

- a **Plenary Indulgence** is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of

Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion, and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible.

- Health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine Redeemer: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13), will obtain the same gift of the ***Plenary Indulgence*** under the same conditions.

Promotion and catechesis on these remedies during the absence of the sacrament of reconciliation can be a source of great consolation for all the faithful.