

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have been wanting to write this letter these last few days, but things keep changing so quickly, sometimes more than once a day, that I have yet to come up with a stable plan in this time. I know that this is a time of turmoil and disequilibrium for all of us. While many of us have experienced physical and psychological sufferings in our lives, we may have not experienced this kind of spiritual suffering. We are likely unprepared for it and are undoubtedly having an emotional reaction to the suspension of Masses and liturgies throughout Ohio. This is difficult and trying time for us all. In this time our perseverance, our faithfulness, and most of all our charity will be tested. Let us then, first and foremost, place out trust in the Lord. “But the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you.”¹ Second, we must invoke the intercession of our Blessed Mother, “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.”

Bishop Brennan’s decision to suspend Mass and all public activities in the diocese weighs upon him heavily. On the one hand, the bishop has a true pastor’s heart and wishes ardently to provide for the spiritual needs of the people of God who have been placed in his care, on the other, he is faced with the reality of a dangerous illness that is spread easily. The bishop making an impossible choice, has chosen to save lives. He is convinced that putting people together is putting their lives at risk. Ultimately, the bishop’s decision is one of charity; he has chosen that which he thinks will benefit the people of God the most.

I do not envy the bishop in his having to make this decision. One of the greatest gifts of the Church is the call to obedience. The admonition often repeated in the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch, “Do nothing without the bishop,”² rings so truly today. Obedience is often praised in the absence of its true cost being felt. When speaking of obedience in the abstract, it seems so noble and we feel so drawn to it. We are always so happy to submit to the decisions of our superiors when we agree with them. When the trial or mortification is expected and the merit to be gained anticipated, swift and joyful obedience comes naturally, but it is when our desires are truly controverted, we are rankled and we sigh with displeasure. This need not be the case. A priest in another diocese was asked by someone as to what he thought of the suspension of Masses and his response was that his opinion on the matter was irrelevant, it was the decision of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

¹ 1 Peter 5:10

² St. Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistle to the Magnesians*, Ch. 7; *The Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, Ch.

In this time, reflection on the writings of St. Catherine of Siena would be a most helpful exercise.

Everything else should be abandoned for the sake of obedience. If you were lifted up in such contemplation and union of mind with Me, that your body was raised from the earth, and an obedience were imposed on you (speaking generally, and not in a particular case, which cannot give a law), you ought, if possible, to force yourself to arise, to fulfill the obedience imposed on you, though you should never leave prayer, except for necessity, charity, or obedience.³

I know that many do not agree with the bishop. Disagreement is not in itself disobedience. If we do disagree, however, we must take care how our opinions are expressed. Many have expressed their disagreement in suitable ways. Some, however, have expressed their disagreement in ways which lack charity and are contrary to the Gospel. Canon 212 § 2 states, “The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church⁴ their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.” Section three of the same canon, states,

According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.⁵

We must, however, remember charity and our “own responsibility, the Christian faithful are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors... establish as rulers of the Church.”⁶ And if we find ourselves in disagreement, only express that disagreement, as stated above, “with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.”⁷ Finally, whether we agree or disagree with Bishop Brennan, he certainly needs and ought to have the benefit of the prayers of us all, in these days which I imagine are very difficult for him.

There is little comfort to be had in this time, but there is comfort to be had all the same. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is being offered daily by all the priests of the diocese. The primary end of the Mass is the glorification of God. This is still being

³ St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, “A Treatise on Obedience”, Ch. 9

⁴ Here, as elsewhere, when the Code uses the term “pastors” it is in reference to the bishops as the shepherds of the Church. It is not using “pastor” in the common American usage referring to the parish priest, the word for the parish priest in the Code is “*parochus*”.

⁵ Can. 212 § 3

⁶ Can. 212 § 1

⁷ Can. 212 § 3

accomplished. While we would wish that those Masses could be attended, the worship of the Church is still taking place.

In this time of spiritual deprivation, we also ought to consider those who suffer with this deprivation more regularly. Those who are hospitalized, homebound, or bed ridden suffer with the inability to attend the Mass and reduced access to the Sacraments, regularly. In this time, we can unite ourselves more closely to them, by facing a similar experience and increase our charity. Furthermore, there is a practice some people occasionally take up to deprive themselves of the reception of the Blessed Sacrament in order to increase their desire for it. The idea of this practice comes from imitating those who have been deprived of the reception of Holy Communion for some time and describe their increased longing, affection, and devotion to the Sacrament, and the complementary increase in grace due to having an enriched disposition upon reception. This practice ought to be discouraged, since the graces received in reception of the Blessed Sacrament will always outweigh any grace gained by increasing desire, when the deprivation is artificial. In our situation now, this deprivation is not artificial. It is, therefore, prudent to increase our desire for the Blessed Sacrament by meditating on it frequently. When the fullness of the public worship of the Church is restored in the diocese, much grace will abound in the reception of the Holy Communion. The Blessed Sacrament received with such devotion, yearning, and with a deepened appreciation and disposition by so many, will be a great thing. While the deprivation is a great loss, no doubt God will draw a greater good from this, as only He can.

There is, of course the spiritual act of communion. “[Y]ou may communicate spiritually, which is extremely profitable, and afterwards you may practise inward recollection in exactly the same way, for this impresses upon us a deep love of the Lord.”⁸ In fact, “[i]t is worth noting that spiritual Communion is sometimes of greater benefit to the soul and more acceptable to God than many sacramental Communions received with little preparation and less affection.”⁹

⁸ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, Ch. 35

⁹ Fr. Lorenzo Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 66

For the proper and most efficacious practice, Scupoli gives us some instruction:

By way of preparation, think of Jesus, and after contemplating the multitude of your offenses, declare to Him your sincere sorrow for them. Then, with profound respect and unshaking faith, beg Him to condescend graciously to enter your heart; entreat Him to replenish it with grace as a remedy against its inherent weaknesses, and as a shield against the violence of its enemies. Every time you succeed in mortifying your passions, or in performing an act of virtue, take that opportunity of preparing your heart for the Son of God, as He has commanded. Then, addressing yourself to Him, fervently beg the blessings of His presence, both as the physician of your soul and as its protector. Ask Him ever to dwell within your soul and so to take possession of it as to repel its would-be destroyers.¹⁰

And Liguori gives us this prayer,

My Jesus, I believe that Thou art present in the Blessed Sacrament. I love Thee above all things and I desire Thee in my soul. Since I cannot now receive Thee sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though Thou wert already there, I embrace Thee and unite myself wholly to Thee; permit not that I should ever be separated from Thee. Amen.

Additional practices, in conjunction with a spiritual communion, may be the praying of the prayers of the Mass devotionally. If you have a daily missal this should be no problem. For those who don't have a daily missal, there is a website which has a number of resources for the Latin Mass. It includes PDFs of the Mass for each day with the propers in place. <http://www.extraordinaryform.org/masses.html>. Also, there are some video streams of the Latin Mass available. <https://www.institute-christ-king.org/videostream> and <http://livemass.net/>. Currently, I am working on getting Mass streaming to Youtube and linking it to the <https://columbuslatinmass.org/> website. I have not resolved all of the technical issues as of yet, but I am hoping to have the first live stream for Laetare Sunday at 9:00am, Sunday, March 22nd.

This is a difficult time for us all. As the situation changes, I will try to keep you informed to the best of my abilities. If you need to get in contact with me, my email is fr.haddad.tlm@gmail.com and if you call 614.224.1295 and leave a message, I will get back with you. I hope that you will pray for me in these days and know that you remain always in the forefront of my prayers.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. C. M. Haddad

¹⁰ Ibid.