



PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK IN THESE TIMES

Recently this Office was approached by a priest, who because of hospital restrictions, was unable to attend in person a dying catholic patient. He did however have telephone access to the person *in extremis*. This may become a common occurrence given restrictions placed by hospitals, especially to those who have contracted the Covid-19 virus, hence some guidelines.

Although the Sacrament of Reconciliation cannot be administered over the telephone, the Apostolic Penitentiary has issued a decree which provides for the forgiveness of sins (even mortal) in these circumstances.

“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).” [Apostolic Penitentiary 19 March 2020]

The priest over the telephone can explain this provision and guide the patient through a brief examination of conscience and an act of contrition leading to an expression of penitence and a request for forgiveness.

In these circumstances the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick would not be able to be administered, hence the Apostolic Penitentiary has provided a special indulgence:

“The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the Viaticum, entrusting each and every one to Divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a Plenary Indulgence on the point of death, provided



that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. Enchiridion indulgentiarum, no.12).” [Apostolic Penitentiary 19 March 2020].

This indulgence would take the place of the Apostolic Pardon.

Likewise, the priest over the telephone can explain this provision and explain the plenary indulgence and the “remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven”. [CCC 1471]

Depending on the time allowed for the telephone call and the condition of the patient, the priest could lead various other prayers, which might include the Litany of the Saints, the Penitential Psalms and the Commendation of the Dying from the Pastoral Care of the Sick.

The priest should console the patient by assuring him/her of a remembrance in Mass and in his other prayers and mentioning that others will do likewise.

23 March 2020