



Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

Post Office Box 12047
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Office of the Bishop

March 27, 2020

Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious, and Faithful in the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama:

It is with sadness that I write to you today to say that, after consulting with our priests, public authorities, and health experts, I judge it necessary to extend the suspension of public worship that I first issued on March 17, 2020. The suspension shall now continue through the day before Divine Mercy Sunday – April 18, 2020. Accordingly, I have asked Fr. Justin Ward, Vicar for Sacred Liturgy, to compile guidelines for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter without a congregation present, following the indications recently given by the Vatican; these are enclosed with this letter.

I am most grateful to the many priests who have been celebrating daily Masses privately in their churches or chapels and even streaming them on the internet, so that parishioners and others may remain connected and seek spiritual nourishment. I encourage our priests to continue these praiseworthy endeavors.

Of course, I continue to pray for you also, remembering you in my own daily celebration of Holy Mass. Even if we must practice “social distancing” at this time, we remain united in the Spirit, rejoicing in hope.

Let us also be sure to remember daily all who have been affected by COVID-19, including the many healthcare workers who are showing heroic sacrifice and generosity in responding to this crisis.

With an assurance of prayers for you and your loved ones, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.
Apostolic Administrator of Birmingham in Alabama

RJB:bwj

Enclosures



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Office of the Bishop

March 27, 2020

To: All Priests with Current Ministerial Faculties granted by the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama*

Dear Father:

Easter is fast approaching and, notwithstanding the present COVID-19 crisis, I hope it will be a time of great joy in your parish or apostolate.

In the event that you should have some *baptized Catholics* in your RCIA program, who were preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Easter Vigil, I wish to remind you that it is necessary to have delegation to confirm such persons validly. The law gives pastors the right to confirm only catechumens and candidates (i.e., those baptized in a non-Catholic Christian denomination) or, for any validly ordained priest, the right to confirm any Catholic in danger of death (cf. canon 883 §§ 2 & 3). Delegation is needed for any priest to confirm those who were baptized Catholic and are completing their sacraments as adults. Therefore, I am happy to send you this delegation, in case you need it this year.

DECREE

In accordance with the norm of canon 882 of the Code of Canon Law, I hereby grant you the faculty to confirm any person, aged 16 or older, who was baptized a Latin Rite Catholic and has prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation through the RCIA process or an analogous program in your parishes, and is properly disposed to receive this Sacrament. This faculty is valid from April 11 through May 31, 2020.

Those under age 16 should be held for your parish's regular Confirmation Mass; if your Mass has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis, it will be rescheduled once public worship is resumed. If you anticipate any difficulties or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With gratitude for your priestly ministry, I assure you of my continued prayers.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.
Apostolic Administrator of Birmingham in Alabama

Very Reverend Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Chancellor

SEAL

*** If you do not have a current *pagella* of faculties from the Diocese of Birmingham, this decree does NOT apply to you; contact the Chancellor for further guidance: fatherjerabek@bhmdiocese.org**

cc: Very Reverend Michael J. Deering, V.G.
Very Reverend Justin L. Ward, V.S.L.

Very Reverend Joseph G. Culotta, V.C.



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Very Reverend Justin L. Ward
Vicar for Sacred Liturgy

MEMORANDUM

To: Priests and Deacons of the Diocese of Birmingham

From: Fr. Justin Ward, Vicar for Sacred Liturgy

Date: March 27, 2020

RE: Observance of Holy Week and Pastoral Provisions for the Sacraments of Initiation

The following guidelines for the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama are informed by the Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacrament's March 25, 2020 Decree in Time of Covid-19. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has clarified that local bishops can apply the "indications" given by the Congregation according to their prudential judgment. Monasteries and religious communities also follow the indications of these guidelines.

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

The Mass of Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord may be celebrated without a congregation in accordance with the directives established when public masses were suspended on March 17, 2020. The Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem is to be celebrated within sacred buildings; in Cathedral churches the Second Form given in the Roman Missal is to be adopted; in parish churches and in other places the third form is to be used. Priests may bless palms in the Liturgy for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord and be made available for parishioners to safely pick them up from up from the parishes.

Chrism Mass

Bishop Robert J. Baker will celebrate the Chrism Mass without a congregation on Tuesday, April 7 in the Cathedral.

Holy Oils will be made available as soon as possible to all priests. The Office of Sacred Liturgy will coordinate procedures for distributing them to parishes in an efficient manner. It will not be necessary to send parish oil vessels to the Cathedral this year.

Priests may transfer the oils to parish vessels and the temporary vessels should be purified appropriately. Priests are reminded that they may continue to use their current oil stocks until they receive new ones.

Upon receiving new oils, priests should see that all the old oils are collected from the ambry or repository, including all vessels with oil for the sick, and disposed of by burning them (*Book of Blessings*, 1127), or burying them. It is not fitting that the Holy Oils be burned along with trash or other household items.

Please note that *Pastoral Care of the Sick* contains provisions for the *ad hoc* blessing of the Oil of the Sick if necessary, and the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* does the same for the blessing of the Oil of Catechumens, should a priest need more of those oils.

Holy Thursday

On this day the faculty to celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper in a suitable place, without the presence of the people, is exceptionally granted to all priests by the Holy See. The washing of feet, which is already optional, is to be omitted. At the end of the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose is to be omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle.

Priests who are unable to celebrate Mass should instead pray Vespers of the day (cf. *Liturgia Horarum*)

Good Friday

The Liturgy of the Passion of the Lord may be celebrated without a congregation according to the rubrics. In the Universal prayer, there is to be included a special intention for the sick, the dead, for those who feel lost or dismayed (cf. *Missale Romanum* pg. 314, n. 13)

The following petition is to be used:

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

The adoration of the Cross by kissing it shall be limited solely to the celebrant. Other ministers who participate should genuflect or make a profound bow.

Sunday of the Resurrection: The Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil may be celebrated without a congregation with the following liturgical modifications:

At “The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or *Lucernarium*”, the preparation and lighting of the fire is omitted, the Paschal Candle is lit simply, the procession is omitted and the Easter Proclamation (*Exultet*) follows. The “Liturgy of the Word” then takes place. For the “Baptismal Liturgy” the “Renewal of Baptismal Promises” alone is necessary (cf. *Missale Romanum*, pg. 371, n. 55). The “Liturgy of the Eucharist” then follows.

In the Diocese of Birmingham, the Easter Vigil may not begin before **8:00pm**.

The Easter Vigil takes the place of the Office of Readings. Those priests and deacons, therefore, who do not participate in the Easter Vigil should read at least four readings with canticles, psalms, and prayers from the Easter Vigil. (cf. *Liturgia Horarum*).

Sacraments of Initiation: Catechumens

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults includes provision for a delay in the celebration of the sacraments in extraordinary circumstances. For example, the bishop can dispense from the Scrutinies (n. 20); the bishop can permit an abbreviated form of initiation (nn. 331 ff.); and the rites can be celebrated at other times of the year (nn. 26-30).

As the Eucharist is the culmination of Christian Initiation, it is not ever appropriate to initiate Catechumens outside the context of Mass. It is the mind of the Church that Catechumens should receive all three Sacraments of Initiation at one time, notwithstanding the danger of death.

Therefore, two options for the Initiation of Catechumens are afforded each pastor:

1) For those parishes who have a small number of Catechumens, “private” celebrations of the Mass are permitted to be celebrated with the individual Catechumens. These Masses should respect the established precautionary directives which limit the congregation to less than ten persons. These Masses should ideally be celebrated in the context of a Sunday Mass during the Easter Season, making use of the *Abbreviated Form of the Christian Initiation of Adults in Exceptional Circumstances* (RCIA 340-369).

2) For those pastors who because of numbers judge the first option to be unfeasible, or if it simply be his preference to delay, the celebration may be entirely postponed until the public celebration of Mass is restored and there can be one common celebration. The Solemnity of Pentecost is suggested as a most appropriate occasion.

Sacraments of Initiation: Candidates

Candidates (those already baptized) for Reception into Full Communion may be welcomed in exceptional circumstances outside of Mass. (RCIA 499). Pastors are encouraged to move forward with the Reception of Candidates in a manner most convenient for them which also observes the appropriate social-distancing parameters. Private abbreviated celebrations, which will certainly prove repetitive, will nevertheless be the best means for bringing candidates into Full Communion of the Catholic Church.

Sacraments of Initiation: Confirmation (exclusive of Catechumens)

Per the attached decree, all priests who have a ministerial assignment in the Diocese of Birmingham are delegated generally to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation from the **Easter Vigil (April 11) through the Solemnity of Pentecost (May 31)**. If circumstances warrant, the delegation may be extended.

Priests should use this faculty **only for the benefit of those adults who expected to be Confirmed at the Easter Vigil this year**. The Office of Sacred Liturgy is working with the Bishop's office to reschedule the Confirmation celebrations for youth which had to be cancelled.

The Celebration of Confirmation need not be celebrated in the context of Mass and should be done with due regard for the social-distancing parameters. As this Sacrament is not often celebrated by priests alone, it is important to review and adhere strictly to the *Order of Confirmation Outside of Mass*, which is attached in both English and Spanish. Requisite copyright permissions for the electronic distribution of the current rite have been secured through the USCCB.