

# March 17, 2020 Pastoral Message and Decree from Bishop Jaime Soto

My Dear Friends in Christ:

The Lord God has awakened us to conversion during this Lenten Season as we more closely unite ourselves with our neighbors in California and around the world responding to the alarming pandemic of the Coronavirus, COVID-19.

The decision to suspend public celebrations of the Mass, along with the other necessary public health precautions, does not suspend the evangelical urgency of repentance and renewal during this Lenten Season. We are particularly called to give witness to personal repentance and renewal for the sake of our own salvation and the redemption of the world.

The outbreak has disrupted some of the habitual Lenten approaches and attitudes forcing us to re-examine our individual and ecclesial disposition to this Sacred Season. Our common baptism is a share in the royal priesthood of the Lord Jesus. St. Paul reminds all the baptized in his letter to the Colossians: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.” (Col. 1.24) Though the public celebration of the Mass is suspended, all the disciples of the Lord Jesus need “to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.” (Rom. 12.1) These words of Pauline wisdom should direct our personal and pastoral conduct during this difficult public health emergency so that the Lord’s healing mercy may continue to bear fruit in our personal lives and the life of the Church in Sacramento.

This public health emergency should make us reconsider the kind of prayer, fasting, abstinence, and charity needed for ourselves as well as the Church. God’s mysterious providence is working in the midst of the confusion among political leaders and public health officials. Though this moment may not be how we imagine Lent, heed the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: “Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (II Cor. 6.2) Let us practice the evangelical qualities of patience, prudence, gratitude, and joy. Pray that the Lord may grant us the clarity of faith to see the wise and merciful hands of the divine potter tenderly molding us into the image and likeness of His Son, Jesus.

May our Blessed Mother Mary stand together with us in the shadow of her Son’s cross so that we might come to know the joy of His glorious resurrection. May her tender intercession bring healing to all who are afflicted, eternal rest to those who have died, and comfort to all those who mourn. May her maternal affection cause us not to lose hope but to hunger more deeply for the Bread of Life and thirst more longingly for the Chalice of Salvation.

Respectfully,

+Jaime Soto  
Bishop of Sacramento

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## DECREE

With a heavy heart, conscious of the accelerating rates of coronavirus infection, also known as COVID-19, I am suspending the public celebration of Sunday and weekday Masses for the Diocese of Sacramento in California until further notice.

This pastoral directive cooperates with the increased public health precautions issued by local, state, and federal officials in order to protect vulnerable populations from contact with the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

As with the previous pastoral decrees issued on March 11, 2020 and March 13, 2020, this decree is especially intended to benefit those members of the Faithful who are sixty years of age and older as well as those with vulnerable health conditions.

The dispensation to all members of the Catholic Faithful from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday will also continue until further notice.

Parish churches will maintain the regular hours, especially on Sundays, to be open for private prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Priests are to privately offer Sunday Mass *pro populo* (for the people) and encouraged to daily offer Mass imploring the Lord's mercy.

Priests are to provide scheduled times for individual confessions. Where possible the schedule should be expanded. Priests should continue the laudable tradition of being available for confession and the anointing of the sick upon request.

Weddings and Funerals may be provided but should be limited to immediate family.

Further directives and guidance will be provided to priests and deacons for the prudent and practical celebration of sacraments during this public health emergency.

It is recommended that Communal Baptisms be suspended until further notice. Pastors should exercise prudential judgment regarding individual pastoral cases.

I remind the Catholic Faithful to properly observe the third commandment, *Keep Holy the Lord's Day*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us: On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body. Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest." (CCC, 2185)

I encourage the faithful to offer a rosary on Sundays for the intention of all those afflicted by the virus, COVID-19 as well as for the sanctification of the Faithful and Clergy during this Lenten Season. I recommend a family recitation of the rosary as a healthy and holy practice during Lent as well as throughout the year.

All the Faithful should seek with greater intention to consecrate Sunday, the Lord's Day, with prayer and attention given to building up the family. Other pastoral and spiritual resources will be made available to assist in keeping holy Sunday, the Lord's Day. Please refer to the Diocesan website, the local parish website, or make use of My Parish app.

I instruct the pastors of parishes in the Diocese to educate the faithful about this directive as well as other public health precautions to be observed in their parishes at this time.

Please pray for those afflicted with COVID-19, their families, and all caregivers. May the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary bring us the healing mercy and grace of her Son, Jesus.

Given at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Sacramento on this seventeenth day of March, in the year of the Our Lord, two thousand twenty.

+Jaime Soto  
Bishop of Sacramento