



SUSPENSION OF MASSES IN THE PARISHES OF THE UAE – LETTER OF BISHOP PAUL HINDER

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you!

The UAE government has announced the suspension of prayer services and closure of all places of worship for thirty days with effect from 9.00 pm on Monday 16 March. The Government has taken this step to safeguard the people in UAE from the spread of the Novel Coronavirus. As we were working very closely with the officials of the government almost daily regarding the situation of our churches, we could rest assured that they were diligently monitoring any risks present for the community and giving us the necessary instructions at the right moments.

I am in full support of the measures taken by the government. We need to understand the criticality of the present situation. The steps have been taken by the UAE government for our safety. The Coronavirus pandemic has been wrecking tremendous damage in countries where it has had major outbreaks and especially where during the early stages, it was unfortunately not contained. Healthcare systems and professionals in those countries were placed under tremendous strain, catering only with extreme difficulty to the massive flood of requests that they had to attend every day.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has repeatedly called for countries to be vigilant and take comprehensive approaches and to learn from the experiences of countries that have suffered massive outbreaks of the virus. It has called on governments to spread awareness and to mobilise their communities to prevent transmission. It is in this regard that I would also like to request every member of our faithful to cooperate with the measures which are proposed by the government.

Each one of us has to take the necessary precautions not to pick up infections by practicing the necessary hygienic measures and social distancing, and in case we are infected, take the due precautions by self-quarantining so that we do not pass the infection to others. Special precaution and care must also be taken by those responsible for the vulnerable and those at risk so that we are well prepared as a community to respond to the pandemic. I would also ask all those who can do so, to make themselves familiar with the wealth of resources for preparation and risk assessment that is available on government channels, the WHO and the Vicariate websites that can be helpful to assist and equip others who may not have access to the same.

Having said the above, for many of you who are faithfully attending mass weekly or even daily, this “Eucharistic fast” that we are called to make is a great sacrifice. Please be assured that the Holy Eucharist will still be celebrated daily by the bishop and the priests for each one of you in our parishes. During this extraordinary time of the pandemic, you are dispensed from the Sunday and Holy week’s obligation. As I wrote in my earlier letter, although you cannot be present physically, you can be present spiritually at the Eucharist, for which I would also like

APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

The Catholic Church in UAE, Oman & Yemen



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to invite each one of you to follow, as far as possible, via the electronic media, which will be made available on the respective Parish websites.

Some of you may have the question we heard last Sunday as a complaint of the Israelites in the desert: *“Is the Lord among us or not?”* In the situation of distress, they had given way to doubt. I can only assure you in faith: *“Yes, He is among us, also during this time of trial.”* Remember the words of last Sunday’s gospel, when Jesus told the Samaritan woman who was asking him regarding the right location of worship: *“The hour will come – in fact it is here already – when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshiper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.”* This remains possible and is our task especially now when we are deprived for a while of the usual celebrations. Do not forget what Saint Paul taught us, that each faithful is a temple of God because as we heard last Sunday: *“The love of God is poured out into our heart through the Holy Spirit which has been given us.”*

All the Churches will remain closed “until further notice” as per the guidelines of the authorities. However, I am asking you, whether at home or wherever you are, do not forget to *“worship in spirit and in truth.”*

I invite you to live this time of abstinence from all kinds of public celebrations in solidarity with those who are sick and those who for other reasons are deprived of the sacraments. We also remember with gratitude all those who are working day and night to help protect our communities during this crisis, especially those responsible from our government and the many healthcare workers, many of whom are passing through moments of severe strain. We pray for all of them and their families.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Paul Hinder

+ Bishop Paul Hinder OFM Cap.
Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia

