



NewsLetter

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*Almighty ever-living God, eternal health of believers,
hear our prayers for your servants who are sick:
grant them, we implore you, your merciful help,
so that, with their health restored,
they may give you thanks in the midst of your Church.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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As the world struggles with a pandemic of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Christ comes with his healing strength, and his Church likewise extends grace and mercy to all people of good will. The USCCB Committee on Divine Worship offers its fervent prayers for those living with disease and for the deceased, as well as grateful thanks to all medical professionals caring for patients and working to find remedies.

Resources for the pandemic may be found at USCCB.org/coronavirus and through many diocesan websites. Through this time of trial, may the human family support one another and soon offer praise and glory to God for its deliverance.

CDWDS Issues Guidelines for Celebrating the Easter Triduum During Pandemic

The celebrations of Holy Week are the most important time of the year for the whole community to gather in prayer to Almighty God. The Chrism Mass, “which the Bishop concelebrates with his presbyterate, should be, as it were, a manifestation of the Priests’ communion with their Bishop” (*Roman Missal*, Chrism Mass, no. 3). On the days of the Sacred Paschal Triduum the celebrations should stand out with “a good attendance of the faithful, an appropriate number of ministers, and the means to sing at least some of the parts” (*Roman Missal*, The Sacred Paschal Triduum, no. 3). The *Missal* even states that Masses without the people are forbidden on Holy Thursday (Thursday of Holy Week, no. 1).

Given the extraordinary circumstances of Holy Week in 2020, such that gatherings of the faithful will not be feasible in many places, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has made a generous concession through special norms promulgated for this year. Bishops have the option to postpone the Chrism Mass to a time when it will be safe for the entire presbyterate to gather in the usual manner. The celebrations of the Triduum have been simplified and a priest has the faculty to celebrate them even without ministers or a congregation. This allowance will permit the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy to continue, offering some consolation to priests who feel helpless with normal forms of ministry suspended, and to the faithful as well, who will know that their bishops and priests continue to intercede with Almighty God on their behalf.

Two decrees were issued by the Congregation: the first on March 19, 2020 provided a set of general indications for celebrating the Easter Triduum, and the second on March 25 reiterated those directions and gave additional guidelines. The Congregation subsequently noted that questions on whether or how seminaries, houses of clergy, monasteries, and religious communities were to celebrate Holy Week should be determined by the Diocesan Bishop. In response to a private *dubium* from the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship, the Congregation clarified that the reference to “avoiding concelebration” in their March 25 decree (see below) was not a general prohibition but rather a suggestion to avoid spreading disease (i.e., social distancing). The bishop should provide appropriate instructions for the clergy of his diocese, according to local circumstances. The decree of March 25 is printed for the benefit of our readers:

CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

Prot. n. 154/20

DECREE In time of COVID-19 (II)

Considering the rapidly evolving situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and taking into account observations which have come from Episcopal Conferences, this Congregation now offers an update to the general indications and suggestions already given to Bishops in the preceding decree of March 19, 2020.

Given that the date of Easter cannot be transferred, in the countries which have been struck by the disease and where restrictions around the assembly and movement of people have been imposed, Bishops and priests may celebrate the rites of Holy Week without the presence of the people and in a suitable place, avoiding concelebration and omitting the sign of peace.

The faithful should be informed of the beginning times of the celebrations so that they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes. Means of live (not recorded) telematic broadcasts can be of help. In any event it remains important to dedicate an adequate time to prayer, giving importance above all to the *Liturgia Horarum*.

The Episcopal Conferences and individual dioceses will see to it that resources are provided to support family and personal prayer.

1 – **Palm Sunday.** 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.

2 – **The Chrism Mass.** Evaluating the concrete situation in different countries, the Episcopal Conferences will be able to give indications about a possible transfer to another date.

3 – **Holy Thursday.** 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 is also omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle. On this day the faculty to celebrate Mass in a suitable place, without the presence of the people, is exceptionally granted to all priests.

4 – **Good Friday.** In the Universal Prayer, Bishops will arrange to have a special intention prepared for those who find themselves in distress, the sick, the dead (cf. *Missale Romanum*). The adoration of the Cross by kissing it shall be limited solely to the celebrant.

5 – **The Easter Vigil:** Is to be celebrated only in Cathedral and parish churches. For the “Baptismal Liturgy” only the “Renewal of Baptismal Promises” is maintained (cf. *Missale Romanum*).

Seminaries, houses of clergy, monasteries and religious communities shall follow the indications of this decree. Expressions of popular piety and processions which enrich the days of Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum can be transferred to other suitable days in the year, for example September 14 and 15, according to the judgement of the Diocesan Bishop.

De mandato Summi Pontificis pro hoc tantum anno 2020.

From the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, March 25, 2020, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

Robert Card. Sarah
Prefect

✠ Arthur Roche
Archbishop Secretary

Apostolic Penitentiary Issues Note on General Absolution during Pandemic

On March 19, 2020, the Apostolic Penitentiary issued a Note concerning the conditions when the general absolution of sins in the Sacrament of Penance might be employed, especially in the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic. The Note first serves as a reminder that canon law and the provisions of the *Rite of Penance* continue to govern the administration of the sacrament even during current events. Individual confession and absolution remain the ordinary way that sins are forgiven. Nevertheless, the Diocesan Bishop should provide guidance to priests and penitents on how best to celebrate Reconciliation while the pandemic exists, “such as the celebration in a ventilated place outside the confessional, the adoption of a suitable distance, the use of protective masks, without prejudice to absolute attention to the safeguarding of the sacramental seal and the necessary discretion.”

According to the Code of Canon Law, the general absolution of sins without previous individual confession cannot be imparted unless, aside from the imminent danger of death when hearing confessions is impossible, “there is grave necessity, that is, when in view of the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors available to hear the confessions of individuals properly within a suitable period of time [*diu*] in such a way that the penitents are forced to be deprived for a long while of sacramental grace or Holy Communion through no fault of their own” (canon 961 §1, 2°). The Diocesan Bishop makes such a determination for his diocese and is

assisted in his judgment by criteria issued by the Conference of Bishops. A complementary norm to canon 961 §1, 2° promulgated in 1989 for the dioceses of the United States, interprets the meaning of *diu* to be “one month,” by which the Diocesan Bishop judges whether and when the conditions of grave necessity for general absolution are verified in his diocese.

If the bishop determines that general absolution is lawful for his diocese, he is to specify its conditions. Since general absolution necessitates a gathering of people, however, that may not be possible for many of the faithful at this time. Nevertheless, the Note offers that general absolution could be offered in those areas where gatherings are already in place, such as “at the entrance to hospital wards, where the infected faithful in danger of death are hospitalized, using as far as possible and with the appropriate precautions the means of amplifying the voice so that absolution may be heard.” If agreement is reached with local health officials, groups of extraordinary hospital chaplains could be established who can provide suitable pastoral ministry to the sick and dying.

Finally, citing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 1452), the Note reassures the faithful that if access to sacramental confession and absolution is truly impossible, “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.” May all people experience the Lord’s saving love in these days, “for his mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136).

Plenary Indulgence Offered for COVID-19 Patients and Caregivers, and All the Faithful

The Apostolic Penitentiary, in a decree issued March 19, 2020, grants a plenary indulgence to those persons suffering from coronavirus disease (COVID-19), whether hospitalized or under quarantine at home, if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfill the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father’s intentions), as soon as possible.

The same conditions for the plenary indulgence are also offered to health care workers, family members, and all those who care for COVID-19 patients, having exposed themselves to the risk of contagion.

Finally, in light of the global pandemic, a plenary indulgence is offered to all the faithful who either visit the Blessed Sacrament, take part in Eucharistic Adoration, read Sacred Scripture for at least half an hour, recite the Rosary or Chaplet of Divine Mercy, or participate in the Stations of the Cross – together with the usual conditions of total detachment from sin, sacramental confession, Holy Communion, and prayer for the Pope and his intentions – “to implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to himself.”

On March 27, 2020, Pope Francis gave an extraordinary blessing *Urbi et Orbi* from St. Peter’s Basilica. Usually given at Christmas and Easter, the prayers and blessing on this special occasion were directed to an end of the pandemic. A plenary indulgence, according to the usual conditions, was offered to all those who prayerfully participated in the ceremony through the media.

These plenary indulgences offered by the Holy See offer great consolation to the People of God enduring the hardships of this time, especially if local circumstances prevent the current or future celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.