CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Liturgical Advice for the Bishops of England and Wales
in the light of the COVID-19 Pandemic
18th March 2020
This advice will be reviewed and developed as necessary weekly

The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, having consulted the Ordinaries of the Dioceses, has agreed that the cessation of public liturgies should begin from Friday evening 20th March 2020. Because of the situation the Church finds herself in, the obligation for the faithful to attend Holy Mass on a Sunday or Holy day of Obligation is removed, until further notice.

The following instruction if now given for the celebration of the Sacraments and sacramentals of the Church at this time.

Celebrations of Holy Mass
Priests (parish priest and assistant priests) who hold parochial office should continue to celebrate Mass in a church within their parish without the faithful on a daily basis. Other priests (i.e. retired from office or entrusted with a non-parochial ministry) may celebrate Mass without the faithful in a church, chapel or their private home. Deacons should not participate in these celebrations.

The continuing celebration of Mass ensures that the faithful can join in spiritual communion with the priests of the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states (1364*): As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.* Daily liturgical resources for those at home, including those for making a "Spiritual Communion" with the priest, will be available on the CBCEW website.

Information about the live-streaming of the celebration of Mass will be made widely available in our dioceses so that the faithful can participate in the prayers of the priest at Mass at home. A fine example of this is from The National Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham will continue its full liturgical programme and this will be available to all via the Internet (www.walsingham.org.uk)

Wherever possible, during this period, churches will remain open, especially on Sundays, for individual private prayer, without any organised services, and offering prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Baptisms

Baptisms should be deferred until such time that the public health advice is that congregations can gather safely. In case of necessity, baptisms should be celebrated with all the hygiene precautions that have been laid down by the Church in its COVID-19 advice.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Confession may be offered on request as long as hygiene and social distancing requirements are observed (eg a physical barrier between the penitent and the priest such as a grille and cloth). The use of Rite II and Rite III of the Rite of Penance is not permitted as this, by necessity, requires the gathering of people in our churches.

First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion

These celebrations should be postponed until a time that allows for families and friends to gather safely within our churches.

Confirmation

The celebrations of Confirmation should be deferred until such time that the public health advice is that congregations can resume public worship.

Matrimony

If possible, the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony should be deferred until such time that people can gather in numbers safely. However, if this is not possible and only in the most pressing of circumstances, then those present for the marriage should be restricted to the celebrant, bride and groom and immediate family, and if necessary, the legal Registrar.

Anointing of the Sick

No pastoral visits should be made to people who are self-isolating until the isolation period ends. However, do offer phone support. When anointing the sick, the Oil of the Sick can be applied using a cotton bud which can be burned afterwards (one end for the head and the other for the hands) and the priest extend his hands over the sick person for laying on of hands, without physical contact. This has been confirmed as a valid mode of celebrating the sacraments which involve "laying on of hands." Visits to people in care homes or hospitals should follow advice from the staff on infection control.

Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil

This will be dependent on the forthcoming decisions of the Bishops for the Holy Week ceremonies.

Funerals

There must be great pastoral sensitivity to this issue. The funeral service should take place at the graveside or at a crematorium, subject to the conditions laid down by the cemetery or

crematorium authorities. Arrangements should be made for a Mass to be celebrated *in memoriam* when congregations are allowed to gather.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas
General Secretary
18th March 2020

Final