

Dear Parishioners,

It seems like it has been months since we have come together for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, although it has just been a few weeks since Mass obligation was suspended, which was then followed by “public Masses” being suspended altogether the next week. I have attached the bishop’s documents that contain the current mandates; they will also be posted in the back of the church at both parishes, especially for those who do not have email. I would like to offer a few thoughts on our current situation starting with some practical matters.

### **1. No “Public Masses” Until the Suspension is Lifted**

Bishop DeGroot has been very explicit and insistent that priests of the diocese are not to have public Mass (*no* congregants) until the suspension on public Masses is lifted. We have to follow that. It is not pleasing to the Lord for a priest or parish to disobey a bishop’s legitimate command. If He is displeased with the command, He will take that up with the bishop or pope or priest, but the one who follows the command (provided it is not immoral or illicit) He will be pleased with. So until the suspension is lifted, I can only offer Mass by myself.

As far as what the future holds, of course no one knows. Bishop DeGroot has not said *definitely* that there will not be any public Holy Week liturgies or public Masses on Easter but his recent communications seem to presume that. So I suspect that this suspension will continue for most of April.

First Confession and First Communion will not be held on the scheduled dates in April, as per the bishop’s instructions. Once the suspension on public Masses is lifted, we will be able to decide on a new date.

### **2. Other Sacraments/Liturgies, Devotions, and Parish Activities**

Religious education, Exposition/Adoration, and Stations of the Cross are all canceled until further notice.

Confession, however, *will still be available* at Christ the King (Webster) at the usual scheduled times: noon on Tuesdays and 3:30 to 4:20 on Saturdays. Baptisms can also still be done (and should be done as soon as possible), although no more than 10 people can be present, including priest, baby, 2 parents, and Godparent(s).

### **3. Anointing of the Sick**

If someone is seriously ill or in danger of death for any reason, I will certainly come and give them the sacraments, regardless of the cause of their illness, provided that I am allowed into wherever they are. I want to mention briefly that the Anointing of the Sick is not just a “blessing,” it is an actual sacrament that bestows real grace for those of advanced age, or who have a grave illness or injury. The Catechism notes that: “Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God.” One of the primary effects of this sacrament is to strengthen a person against these temptations. The Anointing of the Sick will also remit sin, in the event that the person is rightly disposed but unable to make a Confession.

### **4. Funerals and Weddings**

Funerals and weddings can still be held but currently only a maximum of 10 people can be present. There is no joy in this for me, none whatsoever – or for anyone for that matter – but we will also have to strictly adhere to this as well. Please understand that exceptions cannot be made.

### **5. Office Open: We’re Not on Shut Down**

I also want to mention that we’re not shut down. If you’d like to stop by for something, by all means do so.

### **6. Palms**

We do have palms (they are pretty inexpensive) and I do plan to bless them on Palm Sunday (April 5) and set them in the back of the church at both parishes. Assuming we are not back to public Masses by then, you can stop by and pick up some palms for you and your family whenever you like.

## **7. Material Assistance to Parishioners**

The Catholic Foundation (they do the fund raising for the diocese) has established a fund to help people in material need at this time. I know there have been many cutbacks and people may very well be having a hard time getting by. This fund would be for essential material items – for example: food, clothing, electricity, and water. My understanding is that the pastor of the parish submits a request to the Foundation on behalf of the parishioner and they respond as resources permit. So if you are having trouble getting by – buying groceries, keeping the electric on, etc – please don't hesitate to let me know and I will be glad to submit a request on your behalf. Sometimes people are ashamed or embarrassed to ask for material assistance or to let anyone know that they need it. Please don't be, especially not with me. My own family generally had enough to get by when I was growing up but...*just* enough, and not much more than that. If you are in the same situation now and need assistance, then you are a brother or sister as far as I'm concerned and it is always an honor to help, in whatever small way possible, a brother or sister. It will, of course, also be confidential.

The flip-side of this is that contributors to the fund are also needed. I know things are tight for many people right now but if you are able to contribute, you can go to this web site: <https://ccfesd.org/covid-19-relief-fund/> and do so; or, you can call the Foundation at: 605-988-3788.

**8. Needs Anonymous:** if you need something from Needs Anonymous, let me know – I think I can get you in.

## **9. Parish Contributions, Online Giving**

Once again I know that many people are just not currently in a position to donate to the parish and if that's the case, that's certainly understandable. We are cutting expenditures to the extent possible but of course parish expenses still continue. So if you are able to contribute at this time, it would be very helpful and greatly appreciated. You could mail in or drop off a donation at the parish office if you like, or you can also donate online at this web site: <https://osvonlinegiving.com/4520/DirectDonate/74770>. There is a cost to the diocese for online giving but at this time they are making it available free of charge. You just enter or select the amount, choose your parish – Waubay Immaculate Conception or Webster Christ the King – and click 'continue;' the list of parishes is alphabetical so Waubay and Webster will be toward the bottom.

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That is all of the “practical” matters that I can think of to mention at this point and so I would like to turn for a little bit to higher matters, starting with Mass and the suspension of public Mass.

## **What to Do in the Absence of Mass?**

You may have heard the terms “private” and “public” Mass – they've been getting tossed around quite a bit lately. There is really no such thing as a “private Mass” per se. The term “private Mass” is a colloquial term referring to the case where a priest celebrates Mass by himself, or maybe with just a few people present – family members for example. This is commonly done by priests on their day off or perhaps when they are travelling or on vacation. “*Public*” Mass, then, just means that the Mass is publicly announced, with a set date and time, and (generally) anyone can come; i.e., there is a (“public”) congregation present.

Celebrating Mass “privately” has become quite relevant in the past week due to the suspension of “public” Mass not only in our own diocese but throughout the country. To the best of my knowledge, every diocese in the country has now suspended public Mass (Mass with a congregation) until further notice. Bishop DeGrood has been very clear, explicit, and emphatic: no congregants while public Mass is suspended. If someone is in the church when I am wanting to celebrate Mass, I will wait until no one, other than the Lord, is there.

To be without Mass is a terrible deprivation and some people undoubtedly really feel that deprivation; I certainly would be as well, if I couldn't say Mass myself. There is nothing on earth that is even nearly as great

as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There is nothing, even in Heaven, that is more sacred than the Holy Eucharist. How could we go without it? I hope that everyone *is* missing Mass and hungers for it because as our Lord said: “*Blessed* are they who mourn, *Blessed* are they who hunger and thirst.” There is Mass broadcast on both television and the internet and while that is good, it is not the same as being present at the Holy Sacrifice, as direct participation. Even receiving Communion outside of Mass, if you were able, is not the same as being at Mass. This *will* end and the hunger and thirst will be satisfied (well, partially – fully only in Heaven!) and the mourning will be over. It will be a glorious day for those who have felt the deprivation.

The main thing I want to come to here is that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is still being celebrated, around the world, every day. You are not entirely without Mass. If Mass, even private Mass, was *completely* abolished, that would be an unbearable evil and would open the door to much greater evil in our world. The Mass is always propitiatory (atones for sin, makes amends) whether or not there is a congregation, and it always brings grace for a parish, the state, the country, and the world, and thus is still of infinite value for all even if there is no congregation. Canon 904 in canon law brings this out; it states: “Remembering always that in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice the work of redemption is exercised continually, priests are to celebrate frequently; indeed, daily celebration is recommended earnestly since, even if the faithful cannot be present, it is the act of Christ and the Church in which priests fulfill their principal function.” So bear firmly in mind that Mass *is* still being offered. The Eucharist is still here. You are not alone, you are not an orphan.

For those who hunger and thirst, is there anything you can do while public Mass is suspended? As mentioned, you can watch Mass on either television or the internet. It’s not the same, but it is better than nothing. I just finished watching the Christ Mass on the internet and I was grateful for it. The Sunday Mass from our Cathedral is broadcast on television at 10 am (Sundays) on Keloland. The bishop often celebrates this Mass but if he is unable, then generally either the rector of the Cathedral celebrates it, or one of the associates does. It is also available on youtube. And EWTN (probably channel 17 for most people) broadcasts Mass every day.

You may have also heard someone talk about “spiritual communion.” This is something real, something that has been taught and advocated for centuries in the tradition of the Church; it’s not a new phrase or just something some clever person came up with recently to try to satisfy people during a time when they cannot go to Mass. St Thomas Aquinas (in the 1200’s) described Spiritual Communion as: “an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament and in lovingly embracing Him as if we had actually received Him.” We use our intellect and will to commune (or communicate) with God. So Thomas is simply saying that we can still do that, even if we don’t communicate with Him in His actual physicality (the Eucharist). It is still less, yes, than being present at Mass and receiving Holy Communion, which Aquinas also acknowledges when he speaks of the desire to be with Him in the most intimate way, in Holy Communion, but it is also definitely more than nothing. Consider a little analogy. Suppose a husband is in the military and gets sent to a far off country. He and his wife still have many forms of electronic communication that they can and do use. They are grateful for those devices, it is something and more than nothing, but it’s still not the same as being in each other’s actual physical presence. Spiritual Communion, relative to Mass and actual Communion, is like that – it is something, more than nothing, but it’s not the fullness of Mass and actual Holy Communion. If you are watching Mass, I personally think the best time to really intensify your thoughts and make that Spiritual Communion, to really bring the person of Jesus to mind and express interiorly your desire for Him, may be at the time of consecration; but, it can be done anytime, including outside of Mass.

So for those who hunger and thirst, two things you can do are 1) pray along with Mass on TV or online and 2) make a “Spiritual Communion.” Is there anything else? Yes, and one is to: patiently maintain that mourning, that hunger & thirst, do not turn away from it or seek to alleviate it with trivial things. Offer it to our Lord as reparation for sin while at the same time pleading for His mercy. Remember the prayer of Daniel.

There are of course many other things that a person can do, or should continue to do, and I will mention a number of them. But I do believe that the most important and effective thing you can do in the absence of public Mass is to stop by the church and spend some time in the actual physical presence of our Lord. The

church is available at both parishes. At Christ the King I will put out and leave out the books we usually have out for Adoration, in case some reading material helps you lift your mind to God. I do believe that visits to the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass will, more than anything, build your *desire* for union with the Lord and thus build your actual union with Him. From this will come all good desires – to be purified, to do sincere works of mercy, to be united with Him in Mass and Holy Communion, and most of all the desire to do anything or sacrifice anything to reach Heaven. There really is no substitute for being in the actual physical presence of the beloved. This practice does not come from me. It is something that has really grown in the Church over the last 4 or 5 centuries and has been advocated by popes and saints. I am not asking you to trust me (even I don't do that), but I am saying to trust the Magisterium, the saints, and the Church – not to mention simple reasoning; doesn't it make sense that fondness for a person (at least those you are actually fond of) grows (or grew) when you spend/spent time with them and that it wanes if you don't? Isn't this your own experience?

Finally, of course, it is (as always) important to maintain your own personal, daily prayer. There is nothing – no virus, no economic situation, nothing – that should ever take that away from you. If you would like to do the Stations of the Cross, there is a box of the booklets for Stations sitting in the back of the church at each parish.

### **Drawing Good Out of Evil**

St Augustine defined evil as: the absence of some good that should be there. Notice then, that even poor health or injury or extreme poverty, and so on are all evils – the absence of some good (good health, for example, or sufficient material means to survive) that should be there. In the language of the Church's teaching, this is called physical evil. Physical evil is not evil in the common sense of the word evil; it doesn't mean somebody did something wrong or wicked or has lost the state of grace. If someone has a broken arm, then there is the absence of some good that should be there – an intact arm; that's a physical evil. It also needs to be emphasized that an evil is the absence of some good...*that should be there*. An elephant is something good – one of God's creatures – but the fact that there's not one in your living room is not evil because an elephant is not a good that should be in your living room. If you are missing one of your hands, that's a physical evil; if you don't have a 3<sup>rd</sup> hand or a tail, that's not a physical evil – it's not something that should be there.

There are 2 kinds of evil then – physical evil and moral evil. Moral evil is what we usually think of as evil – corrupted spiritual good, wickedness, sin, the devil's character, willingly doing something wrong.

There are two “maxims” of Catholic teaching that I want to bring out here. One is that absolutely nothing happens without God's permission; if God says no, it will not ever happen. There is God's positive or antecedent will – which in our language means He desires it, so to speak, He wills it directly: this is what I want. For example, God's antecedent (or positive) will is that all men be saved; but God *permits* man, allows him, to choose against it (His permissive will).

The second maxim of Catholic teaching that I want to bring out is really the main one here – we just needed the first one in order to get to this one. This maxim is that **God does not permit any evil, including a physical evil like sickness or this new coronavirus, unless He intends to draw a greater good from it**. What good might be in this? Ultimately, we have to say: I really don't know, that lies within Divine Providence – the Divine playbook, if you will. Still, it's not hard to see some ways that some good can be drawn out of this.

With many things being canceled, at least some people might have at least some free time that they didn't have before. How can that time be spent? Well maybe some badly needed rest for starters! Rest, genuine rest (not just goofing off or wasting time), is not a sin, it's a necessity. Our Lord rested. God commands that Sundays be a day of rest. How many sports are now scheduled on Sundays? In fact, it is at least venially sinful to over-expend yourself without a Divine purpose. So yes, by all means, get some extra rest if you need it. You might be surprised at how much real rest and real refreshment lifts your outlook on things and clears your thinking.

Another thing to look for is maybe a little more time together as a family – not just everybody at home staring at their own personal little electronic boxes! You might watch a movie or something together which might lead to

talking about things – all kinds of things: everyday things, bigger things like character and virtue, right and wrong, some aspect of the faith, maybe even family history...who knows what might come up. Maybe the kids who have been coming to the high school religion class could talk about the Screwtape Letters or relativism with the rest of their family. You might even take some time to go to the church as a family and spend a half hour or so in silent prayer together. Genuine family life could well be one of the goods to be drawn out of this.



### ***Be still and know that I am God.***

(Psalm 46)

**I think the main thing that our Lord aims to do with this,** though, is to get us to...STOP AND THINK. Stop, just stop for a minute, look around – at the world and yourself – and think. Stop, our Lord is saying, stop running here and there and take time for some real silence, exteriorly and interiorly, and think about serious things: the direction we are heading, personally and as a society; about the purpose of this life and how (or if) it's being pursued; about death and judgment, and most of all about Him and eternal life. There can be *no* doubt that this is our Lord knocking on the door – rather mildly all things considered – and saying: my sons and daughters, stop and look around for a minute. Do you know who I am? Do you know who you are or what you are meant for? What direction are you headed? Do you think about Me? Do you offer every day to Me, first and foremost? Is being with Me for all eternity your main goal in this life? Is bringing your family to Me the highest aspiration you have for them? If not, why not? Do you know the way home? Have I not told you? Have I not given you My Church so that you know the way, and My sacraments to help you along the way?

Our Lord is undoubtedly making a special call to us with this virus and “shut-down.” Please respond. Why not respond? Take time to stop, engage in real silence – setting aside all the thoughts and worries of everyday life, and ponder the truly big and important questions. These are not only the most important things in this life, things that most cannot find time for anymore, but the answers we give to those questions also affect and direct all of our actions as well – work, family life, and so on. Take the time to respond to our Lord's call – stop and spend some time in silence...thinking. This kind of silence is also restful and refreshing.

### **To Those Who Contract the Virus**

If you or I or a family member actually do contract the virus, and especially if we become seriously ill with it, we will get a lot less philosophical and speculative about it. If you do contract this virus and get seriously ill, be sure to call for a priest. He will bring the sacraments of the Church and indeed the whole Church. Make a good Confession, get anointed, receive Holy Communion and even the Apostolic Pardon if need be. Know that you are not alone, that the whole Church prays with you and for you, that the angels and saints themselves know of you and desire the best for you. Most importantly remember that the Lord is close at hand. Call upon Him, let Him draw close, think constantly of Him, ask Him for what you need. Keep a picture of Him or a rosary or a crucifix with you at all times, along with some Holy Water. Pray to Him also for others and be sure and try to offer your sufferings to the Lord for others, for reparation, for whatever He desires. He will not only accept your offering, He will be very pleased by it and it will lighten your suffering. Call also upon your Holy Mother, she too will come to your aid, bringing her Son – just like she did at the Wedding Feast of Cana.

May the blessing of Almighty God: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain with you forever. Amen. Fr Kuhn.



**Do not be afraid. I am with you until the end.**

(cf., Isaiah 41:10)