



DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

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MOST REVEREND W. FRANCIS MALOOLY, DD
BISHOP OF WILMINGTON

DECREE RESPONDING TO THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Witnessing with deep concern the rapid worldwide spread of COVID-19, a disease caused by a strain of coronavirus,

Bearing in mind the vital importance of preventing or at least slowing the spread of the disease, especially in defense of the elderly and other vulnerable populations for whom it can be particularly dangerous or lethal,

Considering that the avoidance of gatherings of people is among the most effective measures for preventing the spread of the disease,

Seeing that the Holy Mass typically involves a large gathering of people, of whom vulnerable populations represent a sizable portion,

At the same time noting that the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is, if possible, even more necessary during these difficult times,

Having consulted with with pastors and other priests, with diocesan and parish staff, and with other lay members of the Christian faithful,

I, the undersigned Bishop of Wilmington, do hereby **DECREE** the following provisions, taking effect immediately and until further notice:

- While the priests of the Diocese of Wilmington are to continue celebrating the Holy Mass, all of the faithful of the diocese are dispensed from the obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation.
- While no one is bound to make use of this dispensation or prohibited from attending Mass, I urge all the faithful to weigh carefully the decision whether to attend Mass, taking into account not only the risk to themselves but also the risk of spreading the disease to others, especially the most vulnerable, particularly in light of the fact that unknowing carriers of the virus may be asymptomatic.
- Without laying any particular obligation on anyone, I urge all the faithful who make use of this dispensation to unite themselves spiritually to the Sacrifice of the Mass and to sanctify Sundays and other holy days of obligation through prayer and pious works such as reading Scripture, praying the rosary, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, or watching the Mass on television or online.
- Pastors, while they should continue to celebrate daily and Sunday Masses, may decide to reduce the number of Masses if warranted, being careful to communicate such decisions to the faithful clearly and with sufficient advance notice.

- Holy water fonts are to be drained, cleaned, and remain empty.
- There is to be no offertory procession. The gifts of bread and wine are to be placed on the credence table before the start of Mass.
- The practice of holding hands during the Lord's Prayer is to be abandoned.
- The exchange of the sign of peace is to be omitted entirely, proceeding directly from the dialogue *The peace of the Lord be with you always. And with your spirit.* to the Fraction Rite and the *Lamb of God*.
- Holy Communion is not to be distributed under the form of wine; only the celebrating priests will communicate under both kinds. In cases of concelebration, the priests should receive by intinction.
- Those who do decide to attend Mass are reminded that, while no one other than the celebrating priest is obligated to receive Holy Communion at all, those who are properly disposed and choose to receive should exercise caution to do so in a manner, whether in the hand or on the tongue, that avoids any physical contact with the minister of Communion.
- Priests may celebrate a "Mass for Various Occasions," particularly #45 "For the Sick" or #48 "In Any Need," on the days permitted according to liturgical norms.
- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to cease visiting nursing homes and hospitals. They are encouraged, however, to use the telephone and other means of communication to reach out to those whom they have visited to assure them of the care of the community and to pray with them.
- Pastors and other parish leaders are encouraged to consider cancelling or postponing parish events.
- Pastors, at their discretion, may allow other liturgies and devotions to continue (e.g. the Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament and the Stations of the Cross), especially for the sake of petitioning for healing and fostering repentance, always taking care to avoid attracting large numbers of the faithful.
- Consideration should be given that attendance at the celebrations of Baptism, Matrimony, and the rites of Christian Burial should be limited only to immediate family, if their celebration cannot be delayed.
- Priests are to be especially attentive to the needs of the sick during these times, and they should exercise courageous generosity in providing them with the Sacraments and pastoral care while still avoiding undue or disproportionate risk.
- All the faithful of the Diocese of Wilmington and all people of good will are asked to pray fervently and to attend lovingly to the needs of those around them, especially the most vulnerable.

Given at Wilmington this 13th day of March, in the year of our Lord 2020.



+ *W. Francis Malooly*

✠ **W. Francis MALOOLY, D.D.**
Bishop of Wilmington

Joseph W. McQuaide, IV
Very Reverend Joseph W. McQuaide, IV
Chancellor