



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
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OFFICE OF
THE ARCHBISHOP

March 12, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Our human vulnerability is very much in evidence today because of a serious threat to public health and well-being. The coronavirus is a cause of deep concern to us all. As a Church we need to act responsibly, and the archdiocese has taken steps to comply with government directives and common sense by issuing directives to Pastors regarding things like worship and parish gatherings.

As people of faith we also need to take to heart the spiritual dimension of this health crisis. For a proper orientation we can look to the wisdom of the saints. They show us the importance of working as if everything depended on us, and praying as if everything depended on God. These are two sides of one coin for confronting any evil, including illness, which is part of the frailty we have inherited as a consequence of the original sin described in the reading from Genesis that we heard on the first Sunday of Lent.

So we all need to be working conscientiously to follow the directives for health and safety that are being issued nationally and locally, including those things that apply to our church attendance and parish life. This is a duty of charity, for the good of our neighbor and for our own good. And as people of faith we also need to be praying fervently for divine mercy, not only for the recovery of the stricken, but also for an end to this worldwide scourge.

Jesus has a preferential love for the sick, as evidenced in many miraculous healings during his earthly ministry. These were a sign of the redemption he came to bring, one that embraces both body and soul. The Anointing of the Sick is one of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ.

The concluding petition of the Lord's Prayer is for deliverance from Satan and from all the evils and distress that overwhelm humanity. The whole history of the Church is marked by prayer of this nature, often through the powerful intercession of the Virgin Mary or of the saints. Some of the Church's oldest shrines and devotions are connected with deliverance from illnesses and plagues following a communal effort at intense prayer, penance and devotion. In 1633, for example, the residents of Oberammergau in Bavaria, Germany, vowed that if God spared them from the bubonic plague ravaging the region, they would produce a play thereafter and for all time, every ten years, depicting the life and death of Jesus. That tradition continues even now.

How are we to pray in the face of a pandemic?

Some time ago I directed every parish to devote at least one hour a week to Eucharistic adoration. There is no more powerful occasion of prayer than this, and all of us should make an effort, if health and circumstances permit, to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament in prayer. If

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adoration is currently being held in a small confined chapel, it should be moved to the main church where people can attend at a greater distance from one another as prevention to spreading the virus.

As for particular prayers, this one from the *Roman Missal* is very appropriate:

O God, who know that because of human frailty we cannot stand firm amid such great dangers, grant us health of mind and body, that what we suffer for our sins we may overcome with your help.

There are many popular devotions to Our Lady, invoked under different titles, and to the saints. The Rosary is foremost, and under our present circumstances I would also commend to you the Church's oldest prayer to Mary, *Sub tuum praesidium* in Latin:

We fly to thy protection, o holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

We can also pray to St. Joseph, the Patron of the Archdiocese of Hartford; to the saints for whom our parishes are named; to the Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney, the priest of this Archdiocese who founded the Knights of Columbus; and to St. Michael the Archangel whom we already invoke as an archdiocese to be our defender from all evil.

In the ninth chapter of Mark's Gospel Jesus challenged the doubt of an anguished father who came to Him with a sick child. "If you can" the father had said to Jesus, who replied: "If you can? Everything is possible to those who have faith." So in faith let us entrust ourselves, our country and our world to our Savior, and work as if everything depended on us and pray as if everything depended on God.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leonard P. Blair".

Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford