



Office of the Archbishop

Archdiocese of Mobile

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March 9, 2020

To: All Clergy

Dear Brothers in the Lord,

The presence of the Coronavirus in our country, coupled with the fact of its increasing spread, has caused concern among many, including our parishioners. As medical experts learn more about the virus and how it is spread, how long it remains on skin or surfaces, its resistance to the climate, etc., it is for us to use common sense in attempting to stay healthy.

A notice has been sent to all parents/guardians of students in Catholic schools, and a similar notice has already been sent to you, urging common sense precautions:

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when sick.
- Cough or sneeze into an elbow or use a tissue and place immediately in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

I was anticipating that this would be sufficient for addressing this situation. I was not intending to issue a statement regarding liturgical celebrations. Worship of God is integral to the life of faith. Changes in the liturgy deeply affect people and must be carefully considered. I felt that people would make their own decisions when attending Mass. Threatened by the Coronavirus, any gathering of people needs to be conducted in a fashion which safeguards health.

However, some parishes have publically issued their own liturgical guidance. This guidance has varied. This creates a situation where there may be confusion among the faithful. For this reason, I feel compelled to send this statement to you and to then issue it to all the people of the Archdiocese:

- 1) Please follow all instructions from public health officials.

- 2) People are asked not to attend Mass if they feel sick.
- 3) For the foreseeable future, I hereby dispense from the obligation to attend Mass anyone with a serious underlying medical condition for whom contracting the Coronavirus may be a life threatening situation.
- 4) No one is required to use Holy Water Fonts. Pastors are to make certain that the fonts are kept clean and the holy water replaced frequently.
- 5) The Sign of Peace is an ancient liturgical practice. St. Justin Martyr writing in the year 155 A.D. mentions it as a part of the Mass. The Sign of Peace may be maintained in Masses, but no one is required to make physical contact during the Sign of Peace. I hope that this will make people feel safer, however, daily life causes us to come in contact with surfaces touched by many hands (gas pumps, grocery carts, etc.) Even opening the church door is touching a surface which has been touched by many hands. We cannot avoid all contact which stresses the importance of the frequent washing of hands.
- 6) All who distribute Holy Communion are to ensure that their hands are clean.
- 7) Pastors may choose to continue to distribute Holy Communion under both species, however, no one is ever required to receive from the Chalice, including Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- 8) Realizing that when people receive Holy Communion on the tongue saliva does get on the fingers of those distributing Holy Communion, I am requesting that for the time being people refrain from receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, if not for their own welfare, out of concern for the health of neighbor.

I thank you for your cooperation. Let us pray for the health of our people and especially for those who have contracted the Coronavirus.

Sincerely in the Lord,

+ Thomas J Rodi

Most Reverend Thomas J Rodi
Archbishop of Mobile