

Dear Friends,

*Late last night I received another email from the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Bishop Ron Hicks. What is listed below are the highlights of that email, in which clarification is given on pastoral matters like the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick... the celebration of funerals... and the issuance of a Plenary Indulgence during this difficult time. The rest of this article is from Bishop Hicks with my additions in red:*

As all residents of the state comply with the order to stay at home and refrain from non-essential activities, we are nonetheless painfully aware that being cut off from the sacramental life of the church, especially the Eucharist, creates a great hardship for our people, indeed for all of us. However, we make this sacrifice for the common good, convinced that we, like all citizens, have a responsibility in preventing the spread of COVID-19. In fact, doing so will ensure that our people can return to the sacraments as soon as possible.

To offer our people as much pastoral care as possible during this time, please share the following guidelines for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick, and ministering to the sick and homebound, which are in effect until further notice.

### **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Given that our churches are closed and a stay-at-home order is in effect:

- individual confessions are currently not possible; this includes virtual or phone confessions, which are never permissible, nor drive-thru confessions. Despite the good intentions around such novelty, we must attend to our underlying theological tradition of the sacrament, as well as support the stay-at-home order and its intended purpose – to keep people safe in their homes at this time.
- in keeping with longstanding pastoral practice when penitents' access to the sacrament is restricted, they can be assured that their sins are forgiven if they make an act of contrition with a firm resolve to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation after the stay-at-home order is lifted.

... Our Lord knows your hearts and desires to reconcile your lives to Him and He awaits your presence in the Sacrament once the stay-at-home order is lifted and our churches are re-opened. Please remember the Church's precept of making a good confession at least once per year, which many parishioners strive to do during Lent.

### **Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound**

Communion to the sick and homebound is suspended to be consistent with the governor's current stay-at-home order.

### **Anointing of the Sick**

Under the State's exemption for essential services, the Archdiocese of Chicago is including anointing of the sick as an essential service. However, **out of an abundance of caution only a select number of priests will be allowed to administer this sacrament to any confirmed COVID-19 patients until further notice.** *If someone in the parish is suffering from the corona virus and wishes to receive the Sacrament of the Sick, please call the parish and a designated priest will call to set up a time to share the sacrament with you. If someone needs the Sacrament of the Sick and is not suffering from the corona virus, we will do what we can to minister that need, observing new guidelines for social distancing, etc. At this time, most hospitals, nursing homes and senior care centers are not allowing any one in, other than staff, so priests are not allowed to enter even to administer the Sacrament of the Sick.*

## Christian Burials

Burials at Catholic Cemeteries may continue and are not suspended at this time; however, attendance limit and social distancing requirements apply per below.

Please note that our churches are still closed; therefore, funeral Masses are not possible.

However, if a family requests a funeral, there are two options:

- A funeral service, not a Mass, may take place at the funeral home  
the limit for attendees remains 10 people at this time (inclusive of the funeral director, priest, mourners, etc.)
- All attendees must practice social distancing
- A funeral service may take place graveside at the cemetery before committal/burial.  
the limit for attendees remains 10 people at this time (inclusive of the funeral director, priest, mourners, etc.)
- All attendees must practice social distancing

## Plenary Indulgence

A Plenary Indulgence is the remission of the entire temporal punishment due to sin so that no further expiation is required in Purgatory. There are certain conditions that the Church prescribes in order to meet the requirements of the Plenary Indulgence.

The Apostolic Penitentiary also issued a decree granting a Plenary Indulgence during this extraordinary time:

As many people are unfamiliar with indulgences it is helpful to review in a simple way the Church's true teaching on this grace:

- Fundamentally, indulgences (plenary/full or partial) refer to a repairing and healing of the damage inflicted by sin.
- In the English language, the word "indulgence" carries the connotation of "permission" or "license to do something." In the Church and with regard to sin, this certainly is not the case.
- In traditional language, this is the "remission of temporal punishment due to sin." That we, through prayer and action recommended by the Church, can engage in this healing and repair is not because of our own efforts, merit, or power.
- The Church, drawing on the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ and the Communion of Saints speaks of drawing grace from the "treasury of the Church."
- In this moment of isolation and disconnection, the proposal to seek an indulgence re-affirms our connection in the Body of Christ and with the saints.
- The *Plenary indulgence* is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they:
  - unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion,  
or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters,
  - with the will to fulfill the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible, when the suspensions are lifted.
  - In addition, health care workers, first responders, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine Redeemer: 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15: 13), will obtain the same gift of the *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions.
  - Especially in this challenging moment, seeking an indulgence is a way of doing something spiritually and a way of praying for ourselves and for others.

*Please remember to pray for one another. May God bless you and your family. Know that the priests of St. Theresa are praying for all of you.*

Love,  
Fr. Tim Fairman