

## **Liturgical Advice given by the Diocese**

**Baptisms, First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation:** celebrations should be deferred until such time that the public health advice is that congregations can gather safely.

**Sacrament of Reconciliation:** Confession may be offered on request as long as hygiene and social distancing requirements are observed (eg a physical barrier between the penitent and the priest such as a grille and cloth).

**Funerals** There must be great pastoral sensitivity to this issue. The funeral service should take place at the graveside or at a crematorium, subject to the conditions laid down by the cemetery or crematorium authorities. Arrangements should be made for a Mass to be celebrated *in memoriam* when congregations are allowed to gather.

**Archbishop Emeritus Peter Smith RIP:** With great sadness the Archdiocese of Southwark must announce that the Funeral Liturgies of the late Archbishop Emeritus Peter Smith, which are due to take place on 29th and 30th March, will no longer be open to the public due to current public health concerns. It is hoped that it will be possible to hold a Mass In Memoriam later this year. Please continue to pray for the repose of the soul of our much loved Archbishop Emeritus: may he rest in peace.

**Family, a Domestic Church:** Since the Holy Mass cannot be celebrated publicly, please sustain your life of prayer, turning to the Scriptures, the Rosary, to novenas and litanies, using Catholic social media and internet resources to keep connected in the communion of faith. Live-stream celebrations of the Mass and other devotions are available from churches and shrines across the country and around the world. We encourage every Catholic - individuals, couples and families – to create, if there is not one already present, a simple shrine in their home, with a crucifix and religious images, to provide a focus until that blessed day when we are able to gather in our churches once more

## **A letter from the President and Vice-President on behalf of all the Bishops of the Conference**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, so many aspects of our lives must change. This includes the ways in which we publicly express our faith. It is very clear that, following official advice and in order to keep each other safe, save lives and support the NHS, at this time we must not gather for public acts of worship in our churches. This will begin from Friday evening, 20th March 2020, until further notice.

Our churches will remain open. They are not closing. They will be a focal point of prayer, where you will find solace and strength. In visiting our churches at this time, we will observe with great care the practices of hygiene and the guidance on social distancing.

However, the celebration of Mass, Sunday by Sunday and day by day, will take place without a public congregation.

Knowing that the Mass is being celebrated; joining in spiritually in that celebration; watching the live-streaming of the Mass; following its prayers at home; making an act of spiritual communion: this is how we share in the Sacrifice of Christ in these days. These are the ways in which we will sanctify Sunday, and indeed every day.

We want everyone to understand that in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, **the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed**. This is, without doubt, the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the 'serious reason' why this obligation does not apply at this time...

The second vital aspect of these challenging times is our care for each other. There are so many ways in which we are to do this: being attentive to the needs of our neighbour, especially the elderly and vulnerable; contributing to our local food banks; volunteering for charitable initiatives and organisations; simply keeping in touch by all the means open to us.

During these disturbing and threatening times, the rhythm of the prayer of the Church will continue. Please play your part in it. The effort of daily kindness and mutual support for all will continue and increase. Please play your part in this too. For your commitment to this, we thank you.

*'The Lord is my shepherd, There is nothing I shall want.'*