

March 17, 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We find ourselves in a time of confusion, fear, and tension. The range of thoughts and concerns which weigh upon each of us is vast, knowing that the pattern of our lives has quickly become very different than it was mere days ago. In the midst of all of this uncertainty, the Catholic bishops in the State of Ohio, in consultation with the governor and public health officials, have made the very painful decision to suspend the celebration of all public Masses throughout Ohio, at least through Holy Week and Easter. This is a step that I wish we did not feel compelled to take. I realize it is yet another source of suffering in an already trying time. However, given the grave health risks we are currently facing, especially with regard to public gatherings, I believe it is a necessary step in the interest of the common good that will help to curb the spread of this virus.

This is the challenging situation in which we find ourselves, yet we are not alone. As the Church, we are united as members of the Body of Christ; we are united first of all to Jesus and, then, through Him to one another. Only Jesus can bring us peace at this time. He tells us, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (John 14: 27). The peace that Jesus gives us flows from the Cross, that place where the Son offers Himself entirely to the Father for our salvation. We are able to worship God by sharing in that mystery of the Son's perfect self-offering, and the fullest way that we are able to do that is through the gift of the Mass. For that reason, it is with heavy hearts that we bear these current restrictions.

The Mass, though, will continue to be celebrated in our archdiocese. I call on our priests to privately offer the Sacrifice of the Mass for the good of the people of their parishes, for the whole archdiocese, and for all our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are suffering from this illness, for those who are afraid, and for those who are stricken by anxiety and social tensions. This is a time to beg Christ to fill us with the fire of His love so that we may be the instruments of the charity of His Sacred Heart. The people around us need to be loved. These limitations may make us feel like we are far from Christ, but He has promised to remain with us always. He is here with us as we carry our crosses, and He is asking us to love, even when we find ourselves in the midst of personal, family, and workplace struggles and uncertainties.

I want our churches to be accessible, and I ask my brother priests to do all that is possible to keep the doors of their churches open for some time each day so that we can stop in, offer a prayer to the Lord, and be consoled by His Presence among us in a time of trial. This is a time for families to pray together, to join in supportive communion with our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are suffering so much, and to invite God into every aspect of our daily lives – especially the parts that are most painful for us right now – so that while so much else seems to be taken away, we discover anew His presence among us. For my own part, I am increasing my personal prayer on behalf of each of you. Let us unite ourselves, together as one family of God, to the suffering of Christ.

God gave us the Church because we cannot journey back to Him by ourselves. We need each other so much right now! I pray that all of us will be faithful to the call to holiness that we received at our baptism. Christ is with us in this trial, and He wants to be present to those in need through us. Let us band together as Christians. Let us be witnesses to the love of God which conquers all things. Let us offer a world in need the peace that only Christ can give – the peace He has entrusted to each of us!

You are in my prayers daily. Please pray for me.

Your father in Christ,

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr  
Archbishop of Cincinnati