

Memo from: Bishop Mark

To: All Clergy

Date: March 25, 2020

Re: Celebration of the Liturgies of Holy Week and Especially the Sacred Triduum

In this time of need, directives have been issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, as well as the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship concerning the liturgical celebrations for Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. Taking into account the local circumstances of our diocese, these following directives are to be observed by way of dispensation and/or permission as hereby granted. If there are any questions, please contact Bishop Mark or Father Alan Thomas.

Priests are encouraged to invite their deacons to be present and assist in the liturgies of Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum. It is permitted for a deacon's spouse to be present at these liturgies and she may also serve as reader or server. It is permitted for a seminarian of our diocese to assist at these liturgies and he may serve as reader and as acolyte as the case may be.

NO OTHER PERSONS ARE PERMITTED TO BE PRESENT for the Liturgies of Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum for reasons of health and safety. All persons who participate in these liturgies should observe the directives for safe distance, no physical contact (e.g. sign of peace), sanitizing/washing hands, etc.

These provisions take into account the expectation of health officials that the spread of the COVID-19 virus is likely to be close to peak level in our country at the time of Holy Week and Easter.

1. Chrism Mass. This Mass is postponed until further notice. It is anticipated that the holy oils will be consecrated/blessed at one of the first liturgies when the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament (and other churches) are able to resume the normal liturgical schedule. Until such time as the Chrism Mass is celebrated, priests are reminded to continue using the oils consecrated/blessed last year.

2. Mass of the Lord's Supper. This Mass is to be celebrated without the people present. It is to be celebrated in the evening as is the tradition. Since churches are to be locked at 7 pm, this Mass could be celebrated after that time. There is no foot washing and there is no solemn procession to the tabernacle. Following the Mass, priests and deacons are encouraged to pray before the Blessed Sacrament for a time. Night prayer would be appropriate.

3. Good Friday. The liturgy of the Passion of the Lord is celebrated without the people present. Permission is hereby granted for this liturgy to take place in the rectory, having made arrangements for the Blessed Sacrament to be present for the reception of Holy Communion by the priest and deacon. Veneration of the cross may take the form of bowing, genuflecting, or kneeling before a cross during the liturgy.

As an alternative to celebrating the Good Friday liturgy of the Passion of the Lord, the faithful are encouraged to pray the Stations of the Cross at home.

4. Easter Sunday. The liturgies of Easter are to be celebrated without the people present.

a. Easter Vigil. According to the liturgical norms promulgated by the Apostolic See, the Easter Vigil is celebrated only in a Cathedral or church. The Easter Vigil will be celebrated by Bishop Mark at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament without the people present, but joined by the Cathedral priests. Priests are permitted to celebrate the Easter Vigil in their own parishes as long as the celebration takes place in a church and occurs after sundown. Of course, by that time churches are to be locked.

The lighting of the fire is omitted. The liturgy begins with blessing and lighting of the Paschal Candle. If no special candle has been procured due to current circumstances, another new candle placed in the appropriate location in the sanctuary is to be used. (Further directions regarding the Paschal Candle will be addressed in the near future.)

After the Paschal Candle is lit, the Exultet is chanted or may be recited.

Next comes the Liturgy of the Word in which it is permitted to have only 3 readings from the Old Testament, in which the reading from Exodus should always be used. The Epistle and Gospel are read according to the liturgical books.

If water is blessed during the Easter Vigil Mass, it should be in a small amount and is not to be retained for use by others due to the dry fonts directive that remains in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Profession of Faith may be made in the form of reciting the Nicene Creed if the priest is celebrating alone. If more than one priest or deacon are present, it should follow the format of the Renewal of Baptismal Promises.

b. Easter Day. If the priest is celebrating alone, the sprinkling of the people is omitted for obvious reason. Permission is granted for the priest to celebrate only one Mass on Easter during the day, if the Easter Vigil Mass was celebrated. If the parish schedule would normally provide for more than one Mass on Easter Day, permission is given to include all the intentions at the same celebration.

In your messages to parishioners, please advise them that these arrangements have been made out of an abundance of caution for the safety and well-being of everyone. Encourage them to watch our diocesan Proclaim TV Program and Sunday Mass, as well as daily Masses and all the liturgies of Holy Week that are available on cable television or on the internet. Encourage them to pray for one another, especially those who are sick and dying due to COVID-19.

With prayers and sincere best wishes,

Bishop +Mark