



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

April 3, 2020

My dear brothers in Christ,

This will be a Holy Week like none other. Our churches will be empty as we celebrate the most significant liturgies of the liturgical year. This is truly unprecedented. Today, I have sent you an update that speaks about Palm Sunday and the Triduum liturgies. I encourage you to celebrate these liturgies according to the liturgical directives provided. I would also suggest that if it would be difficult for you to celebrate alone, two or three priests may choose to gather in one church to celebrate these private liturgies together.

Another dramatic effect that the coronavirus is having on our parishes involves finances. With very limited income and ongoing expenses, parishes are facing significant financial challenges. Early next week I hope to send you some information regarding this situation. Practical suggestions and guidelines will be offered to help parishes respond to the financial challenges that they face at this time.

Due to all the uncertainty, it is very easy to feel overwhelmed and anxious when faced with this ongoing crisis. Even those who put all of their trust in science can feel discouraged. Medical experts admit that, when faced with this new virus, they do not have all the answers. There is still so much about this virus that is unknown. For some this is difficult to accept. For those who trust in God, the unknown is simply part of the great mystery of faith. We do not have to 'know' in order to believe. As scripture reminds us, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). We put our trust in God and pray for protection, healing, and a quick end to this pandemic.

The Holy See has just approved a votive Mass "in time of pandemic" that can be celebrated daily with some restrictions. A link to the Proper of this Mass and Readings can be found in the update that accompanies this letter. The opening prayer for the Mass is quite powerful, "Almighty and eternal God, provident refuge in every danger, kindly turn your gaze toward us, who with faith implore you in tribulation, and grant eternal rest to the deceased, comfort to those who weep, health to the sick, peace to those who are dying, strength to healthcare providers, a spirit of wisdom to civil authorities, and a heart to draw near to everyone with love so that together we might glorify your holy name." I encourage you to celebrate this Mass whenever possible.

The coronavirus continues to impact our lives. I know that it is also affecting each one of us. Despite our own limitations and fear, we must never forget our calling to be an '*alter Christus*'. We will be given the graces necessary to serve like Christ. This simple fact should give us confidence in this time of great uncertainty.

I would also like to propose something to you that comes from the rich tradition of the Church regarding times of pandemic. On Holy Thursday we focus on the gift of the priesthood and the Eucharist. On this day, I ask that you consider exposing the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. After a brief time of adoration and prayer, take the monstrance outside and bless the four directions with the monstrance praying for divine protection for your parish. If it is possible, you may also wish to process around the church. This should be done privately and not with a group. I will be doing this at the Cathedral at six o'clock in the evening. If this was done at the same time, it could be powerful blessing for our diocese.

I pray that Our Lord will continue to strengthen you and that Our Blessed Mother will wrap you in the mantle of her love and protect you from all harm. Despite the uncertainty and disruption to daily routines, let us remain faithful to our call and bring the love and hope of Christ to the people we serve.

*Oremus pro invicem.*

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerard Bergie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.  
Bishop of St. Catharines