

*Thoughts while public celebration
of the
Mass is Suspended*

Dear CWL Members,

To me it is unbelievable that a situation has occurred that means that Sunday Mass will not be available across the whole country, and indeed it is not available in very many countries around the world! I really do have to pinch myself; to me, the more serious the crisis the more we need our Sunday Mass! So, it breaks my heart that at this time of stress and uncertainty people won't have access to the Mass and Communion. My Bishop in England, Bp. Mark O'Toole, writes:

"I am aware that this measure hits us all very hard, striking to the heart of our priestly identity. It is a time to remember, in the face of this darkness, that *'the mercies of the Lord never come to an end, they are new every morning, great is His faithfulness'* (Lamentations 3:22-23)"

And when he speaks of "our priestly identity" he is speaking about the identity of all of us and of the Church as a whole. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

"From that time [the beginning of the Church] on down to our own day the celebration of the Eucharist has been continued so that today we encounter it everywhere in the Church with the same fundamental structure. It remains the centre of the Church's life." (CCC §1343)

We are at our heart a Eucharistic Church whose life is centred on the Mass.

But not being able to gather for Mass is the new reality for a limited time; but let us not focus on what we cannot change but look at what we can do.

Many priests like myself are trying to set up arrangements by which we can still celebrate our Sunday Mass at the usual time and have it 'live streamed' through the internet. In my parish the local funeral home has the facility to broadcast funerals, and very kindly they have said we can use the same system to 'live stream' our Sunday Mass. In this way as many people as possible can still listen to the readings, hear the words of the Mass as it is celebrated, and spiritually commune with other parishioners.

Obviously there will be a number of people who will not know how to watch a 'live stream' broadcast via the internet, so I wonder if these people could approach someone who they feel save being in contact with – perhaps their children, grandchildren or great grandchildren – and ask them for help. As Sunday mornings are not a time when much else is happening, I hope – *perhaps naïvely* – that multiple generations of a family might just sit together and spend this relatively short time praying for our world and particularly praying for those who are most seriously affected by what is going on.

Additionally, many priests like myself will be celebrating Mass every day for the foreseeable future. While this will have to be done with no congregation present, hopefully knowing that the Mass is being celebrated in our parishes will lift your spirits and enable people to join in 'spiritually' with the celebrations. I would urge everyone to remember every day that Mass continues to be celebrated.

Bishop Mark in England also states in his letter to his priests:

“...during this time, we must ‘storm heaven’ for the sick and dying, for the bereaved, for those working in healthcare and for those seeking a vaccine.”

Hopefully during the next weeks and months all Catholics will re-double their commitment to daily prayer. I really hope that every Catholic will ask themselves, ‘How much time do I spend in prayer each day?’ and challenge themselves by asking whether this gives due priority to what is at the heart of our relationship with God. If there was ever a time when Christians need to pray for the Church and the world, this is it. By the effort we put into our ‘spiritual communion’ with God and one another we will show that even if we physically cannot gather together, we are united as one body in our prayer. The Mass is always offered *“firstly for your holy catholic Church. Be pleased to grant her peace, to guard, unite and govern her throughout the whole world, together with your servant Francis, our Pope and N. our Bishop, and all those who, holding to the truth, hand on the catholic and apostolic faith.”* (EP1) So know that you are included in the prayers of every Mass.

All the above focuses on the difficulties we are facing, but I also want to say something positive. One statistic I heard today really surprised me as I hadn’t thought about it: Marshall Burke, an assistant professor at Stanford’s Department of Earth System Science, has written, “The reductions in air pollution in China caused by this economic disruption likely saved twenty times more lives in China than have currently been lost due to infection with the virus in that country”. I also wonder with much less traffic on the roads, what has been the reduction in traffic accidents? In 2017 there were 1,841 people killed on our roads in Canada, and many reports talk of previously busy roads being nearly empty, so how many people won’t die in road accidents due to the current situation? For many people the most polluting thing we do is air travel, and we hear that in some parts of the world the airlines are almost at standstill, so by how much will this current crisis slow global warming? Thus, a challenging question is: at the end of this will there actually be more people alive than if it hadn’t happened? And will the planet be less polluted?

But most importantly, how has this effected how we see our society and our values? Perhaps now more than ever we will see our interconnectedness, and how we are needed, particularly by those who are older or vulnerable in some way. Politicians quite rightly often praise the armed forces, police officers, nurses and teachers, but now we see the value of those who stack our shelves in supermarkets, those who clean our buildings, those who remove our garbage, and the multitudes who do the usually less noteworthy jobs that keep our society running so well.

And within the Church, my bishop in England previously said that often a ‘fast’ greatly increases our appreciation of a ‘feast’; how will our ‘fasting’ from Sunday Mass affect us when we come back together for this ‘feast’? Hopefully when we will come together again, we will have a reawakened love for the Mass that will show itself in a greater level of ‘full and active’ participation.

I believe that the current situation gives us an opportunity to look at our lives, to review our daily prayer, to renew our love for the Mass, to cherish our relationship with others, and to take stock and discover anew what truly fulfils us. My hope is that after this we will come back together as a stronger Church, a more united society and as more whole and focused individuals.

Remember to wash your hands, keep in touch with those who are alone and re-centre your life on prayer.

With a promise of prayers.

Fr. David