



MEMORANDUM

To: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders, Parishes, Schools, Religious Houses

From: Reverend David Cirata

Re: Liturgical Celebrations and Public Health Concerns

Date: 5 March 2020

*Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured,
while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted (Isaiah 53: 4).*

In light of the current health concerns regarding Coronavirus /COVID-19, and realizing that we are currently in a season wherein people are most susceptible to influenza and other illnesses, it is prudent to remind ourselves of some basic common sense precautions in order to prevent the potential spreading of illness. Public health officials remind us that remaining calm and practicing good hygiene, including performing diligent handwashing, remains the most effective way to curb the spreading of germs.

As has been our diocesan policy during times of public health concerns, the local pastor/administrator/pastoral leader has the discretion to exercise the options already provided in the *Roman Missal*; namely, omitting the invitation to the sign of peace and temporarily discontinuing the reception of the Precious Blood from the chalice until such time as a health concern has subsided.

Even in ordinary circumstances the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) indicates that the invitation to offer the sign of peace is made “if appropriate” (no. 154). And with reference to Communion from the chalice, “Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species” (no. 282).

It bears repeating that all ordinary (priests and deacons) and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be attentive to practice good hygiene when they are exercising their ministry during parish Masses and service to the infirm in homes, hospitals and health care facilities in the diocese.

Current public health concerns require a pastoral response which impacts liturgical celebrations in the Diocese of Toledo. Therefore, in order to reassure the faithful at this time of heightened awareness due to the potential spreading of Coronavirus/COVID-19 and influenza, the Diocese of Toledo strongly encourages initiating the following procedures beginning this weekend, the Second Sunday of Lent, 7-8 March 2020, until further notice.

- Everyone should be strongly encouraged to remain at home when seriously ill. They are not obliged to attend Mass, and even out of charity they ought not to attend. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states the “Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor” (no. 2181). In this instance, the faithful should be encouraged to view or listen to a broadcast of Mass and to make a spiritual communion.
- Ordinary (priests and deacons) and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are strongly encouraged to practice good hygiene by washing their hands with soap and water prior to the celebration of Mass. Hand sanitizer may be used prior to distribution of Holy Communion, which should be done discreetly so as not to denote a ritual act. Handwashing is the most effective way to prevent the spreading of germs.
- The invitation to the sign of peace, although a regular part of our liturgical practice, is always an option. Priest celebrants and deacons are strongly encouraged to exercise the option, provided in the *Roman Missal*, not to extend the invitation, “Let us offer each other the sign of peace”. The *Lamb of God* should begin immediately after the words, “The peace of the Lord be with you always” and the response, “And with your spirit”. If this option is not exercised, the pastor/administrator/pastoral leader should consult and instruct the faithful to exchange one common and appropriate gesture.
- Priest celebrants are strongly encouraged to exercise the option, provided in the *Roman Missal*, to refrain from the distribution of the Precious Blood to the faithful and to distribute Holy Communion under one species (the Sacred Host). Pastors/administrators/pastoral leaders should make arrangements for those suffering from severe cases of celiac disease to receive the Precious Blood.
- As Catholics, our faith reminds us that the whole Christ, that is his Body and Blood, is present when only the Host is received. Pastors/administrators/pastoral leaders should instruct the faithful, by means of homilies, bulletin articles, announcements, etc., that Christ “whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species” (GIRM, no. 282).
- Kindly note that the faithful should be strongly discouraged from holding hands during the Lord’s Prayer, a gesture that is not prescribed in the *Roman Missal*.
- Holy water fonts should be emptied, cleaned and then refreshed regularly with blessed water.

During this Lenten season, may Christ who reached out with compassion to the woman at the well; who healed the man born blind; and who raised Lazarus from the dead, grant us his healing and be our remedy for all that ails us physically, spiritually and emotionally.

The Office for Divine Worship strongly encourages everyone to implore the Lord for health and healing during this time; therefore, the following intention may be added to the intentions of the Universal Prayer.

Suggested Intention for the Universal Prayer:

That in this time of health concerns and illness, our merciful and loving Father will strengthen our trust in his divine providence, bring healing to the sick, comfort to the dying and eternal rest to those who have died, let us pray to the Lord.