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to unite the faithful from all walks of life in order to support, defend and advance the efforts of the teaching Church

Pastoral Remedies in Time of Crisis

By: Philip C. L. Gray, JCL

And he arose and left the synagogue, and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they besought him for her. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her; and immediately she rose and served them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them (Luke 4:38-40 RSVCE).

At the present time, our entire world is in a grip of fear and isolation from the COVID-19 virus pandemic, better known as the Coronavirus. At the time of writing this article, health experts report that cases in the United States have not yet peaked. Large portions of the private and public sector have come to a grinding halt with schools closing, major sports events canceled, and social centers closing down. As businesses and manufacturing plants temporarily shut down, millions of Americans are moving into unemployment with no hope for a short-term job. Americans are looking to their state and federal governments for guidance and relief. Although the President of the United States called Sunday, March 15th, as a day of National Prayer to seek God's blessing, who publicized his proclamation? While many bishops are calling for prayer, it also appears many bishops in the United States are taking cues primarily from the secular world as they issue guidelines during this difficult time.

Over the past ten days, both Catholics United for the Faith (CUF) and The Saint Joseph Foundation (SJF) have received numerous complaints and questions regarding potential abuses of authority or violations of rights as bishops issue norms and guidelines to address the Coronavirus pandemic. These inquiries have come from priests, deacons, and laity from across the United States. The purpose of this article is twofold. First, I hope to address those questions and concerns by providing general principles that should guide bishops, pastors, deacons, and the laity as they make decisions on pastoral care during this difficult time. Second, I want to share Hope.

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Prayer of Catholics United for the Faith

O God our Father, who sent Your only-begotten Son to suffer and to give His life for the life of His Church, rule, protect, and nourish her continually, we beseech You. Teach us of Catholics United for the Faith to direct our zeal first of all to the renewal of our own hearts. Then, if it be Your holy will to allow us to be in any way Your instruments in the wider renewal of Your Church, give us the grace to know what services, small or great, You ask of us, and let the Holy Spirit teach us to perform them in obedience, patience, and charity, leaving entirely to You what fruits they may bear. We ask this through the same Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **AMEN.**

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,
have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, Mother of the Church,
intercede for us.

St. Joseph, Head of the Holy Family
and Patron of the Universal Church,
pray for us.

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Before offering answers to the common questions being asked, it would be prudent to recall certain principles that should be operative.

Exceptions are Not Normative

This is an easy one to understand. The very nature of an exception is that it is outside the normal. This is what happens when a governor or president declares a state of emergency or gives some other exceptional status to a situation. The status granted allows powers to be exercised and control to be taken that normally would be prohibited. For example, on 13 March 2020, President Trump declared a national emergency under the 1988 Stafford Act. In doing so, he allowed the federal government to tap into a \$50 billion disaster relief fund. On 18 March 2020, the President invoked the Defense Production Act. This allows the federal government to marshal private sector production of necessary medical supplies and engage Department of Defense resources (in this case, two hospital ships) to better address the crisis.

In contrast, under Canon Law there are no special powers granted or invoked during exceptional situations. By his consecration, a bishop enjoys the fullness of the Power of Orders, and by appointment as a diocesan bishop, he receives specific mandate to use that power. Divine Law, both Natural and Positive, as well as ecclesiastical laws, regulate his use of that power. These realities do not change during times of crisis.

As a legal system built on Divine Law and Natural Law principles, Canon Law utilizes dispensations, relies on the Principle of Subsidiarity, and upholds the primacy of conscience when exceptional circumstances occur. A prime example that many bishops and priests understand is the use of faculties in circumstances of war versus circumstances of peace. Army chaplains serving in war zones are typically not bound by certain ecclesiastical—man made—laws in order to make the sacraments more easily obtained by the soldiers they serve. This is done either by dispensation or by the granting of special faculties. In either case, when the circumstance causing the dispensation or special faculty ends, the dispensation or special faculty also ends.

It is crucial to note that the dispensations and special faculties are granted so that the Catholic faithful have sufficient access to the healing graces of Jesus Christ in time of crisis. Put another way, when exceptional circumstances occur, exceptional measures

should be taken by the Church to increase the opportunities for grace and the sacraments. That is the Mission of the Church.

Adding to the disaster, there are bishops across the country doing the opposite. Rather than taking measures aimed at making the sacraments available in this time of crisis, they are issuing prohibitive laws to restrict the sacraments. In many places, they are removing any possibility for the sacraments. This not only violates the spirit of Canon Law and the Divine Rights of the Faithful, it also violates the very Mission of the Church. The potential for these new, prohibitive laws to become the new norm when the crisis passes is greatly concerning. For example, the prohibition by many Latin bishops of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue.

As in times of war, bishops should use dispensations rather than prohibitions to address the pastoral situations occurring because of a pandemic. Dispensations are used to relax an obligation. They allow a person to choose whether or not to participate in a good when, for them, a disproportionate evil may result. As in a time of war, the use of dispensations has an evangelistic element that encourages subsidiarity and solidarity.

The Principle of Subsidiarity permeates the structure of the Catholic Church and expects decisions to be made at the lowest level possible. The administrative and sacramental norms of the Church are built on this essential principle. It's a known fact that parishes within a diocese differ substantially, not just due to size and location, but also because of spirituality and cultural values. Because of these realities, the Church recognizes pastors to be administrators of their parishes and provides them certain discretion in the exercise of pastoral care and liturgical expressions. This is the Principle of Subsidiarity at work within the structure of the Church. What I am getting at is this: pastors are in a better vantage point to make decisions on the celebration of Mass during a crisis than anyone else. A bishop should be in close collaboration with his priests. Rather than issuing prohibitions, he should issue guidelines in the form of dispensations and special faculties to allow his priests the opportunity to make prudent decisions in the pastoral care of their parishioners.

And, bishops should trust the conscience of the individual who, if properly informed, will make the right decisions in time of crisis. It's what they do in time of war; why not in time of a pandemic?

It all begins with Formation

It is a divine truth that Jesus made Himself available to the sick and suffering, and to those who were not. The passage cited above is the second record of Jesus healing a person in the Gospel of Luke. It comes immediately after He begins His public ministry. He continues His ministry of healing even to the moment of His arrest, when He heals the ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant (Lk. 22:50-51; cf. Jn. 18:10). Throughout the Gospels, He walks among those with fevers and those with leprosy. Jesus made Himself present to all.

As Catholics, we are taught to emulate the saints who, in imitation of Jesus Christ, gave their lives in care of the sick and suffering. That suffering, as we know, is redemptive when united to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:6; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; Pope Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici dolores*, 11 Feb. 1984; cf. Catechism, arts. 1500-1510). It is also a matter of fact that illness, especially serious illness, becomes an occasion to consider death and its consequences. Depending on a person's life of Faith, that consideration of death will encourage a broad range of emotions from radical fear to confident tranquility.¹

From a human perspective, it is also a matter of fact that broad, sweeping changes that affect large numbers of people in ways they cannot control provoke fear and anger. When those changes isolate individuals, depression follows. These are the very social maladies that Jesus and His saints countered by their words and actions. They gave hope in times of despair, and peace of heart in times of alarm. When Jesus healed, He also taught. When the Apostles healed, they used the opportunity to preach the Gospel. The healings motivated an attentive mind and heart; the teachings planted seeds of Faith and instilled Hope. Today, that is what people in the pew expect from the Church and her pastors. It's what should happen now.

To avoid the anger and fear that result from broad, sweeping changes, the Church has always stressed the necessity of formation. It is a commonly known fact that the broad changes that swept the Church following the Second Vatican Council caused widespread, spiritual and moral distress. A principle cause of this was poor formation before changes were implemented. This not only allowed misunderstanding on the part of the faithful to occur, it also allowed many abuses to be perpetrated by those implementing illicit changes. As we know, many of those illicit changes became normative.

In this time of crisis, it is imperative that the faithful receive proper instruction on the “why’s” and “how’s” of changing norms. More importantly, the suffering must be viewed as redemptive, or the panic and fear will continue to drive the human response. What is needed is Faith and Hope. These can only be instilled if the pastors of the Church are engaged with the people—not isolated from them.

Dehumanization

It is a recognized fact that the means of social communication used today dehumanize the experience of community. The Fathers of Vatican II warned of this phenomenon more than fifty years ago, and the rapid growth of the means of social communication have prompted numerous Vatican statements on the matter. When news moves quickly through social media platforms, it often moves faster than the human heart or reason can contain.

The news of the pandemic pervades all social media platforms, and it is driving a growing fear within the population. This fear is already turning to depression and anger as people are isolated. As intended by Christ, the Word of God and the Sacraments are the ordinary remedies for isolation, fear, and anger. Regrettably, as of the date of this article, the restrictions placed on the celebration of sacraments by many bishops in the United States are more radical and isolating than those imposed by State or Federal Governments. Specifically, the ban on large gatherings by many state governors does not apply to religious gatherings due to the Second Amendment. Additionally, a large number of parishes would never reach the size of a prohibited “large or mass gathering” as defined by their state. This is especially true if a bishop simply issued a dispensation from the obligation of attending Mass and encouraged the elderly, those with compromised immune systems, those exhibiting symptoms, and those who have reason to believe they have been exposed to the virus not to participate.

The consolations given to people at Mass are huge. As you know, the Mass is Jesus making Himself available to His people. The celebration of Mass and participation by the faithful in the Mass is an ordinary means of salvation. Removing a significant source of hope and consolation during such an isolating time will have a significantly damaging effect on the spiritual lives of the faithful. In many cases, it will be more damaging to the soul than the Coronavirus would be to the body. People are asking, “Why does my state

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government allow us to gather for Mass, but the Bishop will not?" People are especially upset over the prospect of not being permitted to attend Holy Week or Easter Masses.

Prudent and Reasonable

To paraphrase both St. Thomas Aquinas and a Principle of Law, authentic law is reasonable and prudent. Exceptional circumstances strain the reasonableness of general norms. Exceptional circumstances create serious difficulties, even impossibilities, for people to fulfill obligations. Our Lord says that His yolk is easy, and His burden is light (Mt. 11:30). Because the purpose of law is directed to our salvation, laws that are overly burdensome should be avoided. When a law becomes overly burdensome because of a temporary, exceptional circumstance, there are three possibilities that exist to alleviate the strain. These possibilities are built into the universal law of the Church.

Ultra posse nemo obligatur. This principle of law is translated, "No one is bound to the impossible." It is applied in Canon Law in several places. For example, Canon 960 provides, "Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary means by which a member of the faithful conscious of grave sin is reconciled with God and the Church." The canon goes on to say, "Only physical or moral impossibility excuses from confession of this type." This allows the absolution of mortal sins to be given in a communal setting within war zones. It also allows absolution to occur during the celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick when the person cannot speak, and it is presumed the person would want to be absolved. In both situations, an exceptional circumstance occurs, and the Church provides a means for the grace of salvation to be extended without offending or changing the usual conditions of ordinary circumstance. In fact, in a recent letter from the Major Penitentiary of the Catholic Church, the use of alternate ways to impart sacramental absolution is highly encouraged during this crisis.² What is remarkable about his statement is that he expects the Sacrament to be celebrated, not prohibited.

This principle also applies to the other sacraments. It applies in any exceptional circumstance when a moral or physical impossibility denies a person the ability to fulfill an obligation. No dispensation is needed. What is needed is proper catechesis, and in

some situations, broader faculties extended to ministers of the sacraments.

A moral impossibility exists for healthcare providers to attend Mass if they are on duty during all available Mass times. This likely will occur during a health crisis. A moral impossibility to attend Mass on Sunday also exists for the elderly and those who are at high risk of death if they catch the Coronavirus, as well as for those in quarantine or imposed isolation. The faithful should be educated on this point.

When an exceptional circumstance does not create an impossibility but does cause a fluid situation that could become an unreasonable burden for some while not for others, a prudent approach would be to issue a broad dispensation from the burdensome obligations. In these situations, ecclesiastical authorities can and should dispense from merely ecclesiastical laws that are available for dispensation. The Coronavirus does create a fluid situation for most of us. From day to day we may not know whether it is prudent to attend Mass or not. For a bishop to issue a general dispensation from the obligation of attending Mass on Sunday and holydays is a prudent measure. It allows each member of the faithful to make a personal and conscientious decision without fear of sin. It encourages greater prudence and provides for an evangelistic opportunity. The dispensation should be written with a motivation that is clearly explained and encourages the faithful with words of Hope.

A third path that can and should be taken to alleviate the burden of exceptional circumstances is for a bishop to rely on the Principle of Subsidiarity and extend broader faculties to his priests. These broader faculties should focus on the specific needs caused by the crisis. The bishop should also engage his priests in continual dialogue and provide for them guidelines and directives on how to apply the broader faculties so that the widest number of people possible will benefit from the graces of the Church during a time of crisis. The guidelines and directives should not be prohibitive as much as they are respectful of the Divine Right of the Faithful to obtain the graces of salvation from the Church, particularly through the Word of God and the Sacraments (Canon 213). If the directives become too restrictive, the bishop would deny the Faithful that which is a Divine Right and violate his own obligation to provide the sacraments. Because this touches on Divine Law, such restrictions must be avoided.

Possible Resolutions

When granting broader faculties, dispensations and providing guidelines, the actual situation occurring in the specific place must be considered. Because the need to slow the spread of Coronavirus is a significant concern, the measures identified by health officials should be implemented by pastors when they celebrate Mass and the other sacraments. For example, a presiding priest could ask that only families sit in the same pew, and every other pew remain empty. Particular priests could be dispensed from distributing Holy Communion, allowing older and more vulnerable priests to remain on the altar alone throughout Mass. A dispensation allowing a deacon or an extraordinary minister of Communion to self-communicate before distributing could also be provided. This arrangement already occurs during communion services and would allow older priests to avoid close contact with anyone during Mass. Even allowing a priest to wear a mask or respirator during the Mass would not affect the validity of the Sacrament and could be an appropriate easing of ecclesiastical requirements during such a crisis. An allowance for ministers of Communion to wear gloves while distributing would be appropriate without offending the right to receive the sacraments. Providing hand sanitizer in the back of the church for use by the Faithful would be prudent measure. Holy Water could be removed from the common use fonts, but still be made available in tanks to be poured into bottles and taken home for private use. These and other prudent measures could be provided as guidelines by a bishop, while reserving to individual pastors the use of such measures as common sense and parish circumstances demand.

The key point to remember is that all prudent measures should be exhausted before a bishop begins to restrict rights; and the provision of Mass and the sacraments should never be denied the faithful altogether. Such an act runs completely contrary to the Mission of the Church. It's one thing if civil authorities enact emergency measures that disallow people from attending Mass. That would cause a moral impossibility to attend, and the proper response of a bishop or priest would be to communicate words of encouragement and Hope to their people. It's quite another issue when the civil authorities allow the Mass and sacraments to be provided, but the bishop does not.

Questions Answered

I turn now to apply the principles noted above and answer some of the questions we have received.

1. Does a diocesan bishop have the authority to cancel “non-essential” activities in a parish, such as Stations of the Cross, CCD, bible studies, etc.?
Generally speaking, no. A pastor is the administrator of his parish. Under jurisprudence, it is the pastor, not the bishop, who can set Mass schedules. I have won and lost cases because of that jurisprudence. That being true, it would be the pastor, not the bishop, who is entrusted with making decisions about what is essential and what is not. He should do so with guidelines from the bishop, but not prohibitions. This is the principle of subsidiarity at work.
2. What are the canonical issues involved with a bishop shuttering churches and suspending all public Masses?
For a bishop to do this, he must issue a decree that is motivated in fact and specific to the circumstances he is addressing. The decree must be properly promulgated and thereby actionable; that is, open to challenge. More at issue is that the faithful have a Divine Law right to the sacraments. Personally, I do not believe such a directive is legitimate.
3. What canonical arguments exist in favor of a pastor continuing to celebrate the sacraments for his people?
See #2 above. The vocation of a pastor is to minister to the spiritual needs of his people out of the Word of God and the Sacraments. Just as a parent's obligations to children are not suspended when a crisis occurs, neither is a pastor's.
4. Can a person be required to receive Holy Communion in the hand during the Coronavirus pandemic?
No, not legitimately. This will be disputed, and the person refused Holy Communion will likely not see a decision in their case until after the crisis is past. A greater concern is that such refusal will become normative. If a person is refused Holy Communion on the tongue, that person will be faced with a hard decision to take canonical action and appeal or not. The SJF is ready to assist anyone in making that discernment.
5. What is necessary to confect the Eucharist, as opposed to what may be in the rubrics or a part of custom?

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As per any sacrament, to confect the Eucharist requires valid matter, form, and intention. For the Eucharist, valid matter consists of unleavened bread (in the Latin Church and most Eastern Catholic Churches) and pure grape wine. The form consists of the words, “This is My Body” and “This is My Blood” said at the appropriate time. The priest must intend to confect the Eucharist. The “breathing” on the species during consecration is a beautiful custom, but is not obligatory. Consequently, a priest who wears a mask during the celebration of Mass, or distributes Holy Communion with gloves, or uses other precautions that do not affect the matter, form or intention, does not harm the validity of the Mass. Such precautions should be taken in collaboration with the bishop.

6. Can a priest use soap or hand sanitizer during the purification of his hands during Mass?

The rubrics call for water. Adding lemon juice or even isopropyl alcohol to the water as a disinfectant would not, in my opinion, affect the liceity of the act. Doing so would be far less offensive to the rubrics than wearing gloves to distribute Holy Communion, which is reasonable during this crisis.

7. Can extraordinary ministers be used in lieu of the presiding priest so the priest can remain socially distant and lessen the risk of spreading the virus? Can extraordinary ministers self-communicate for the same reasons?

Yes. These measures should be taken in collaboration with the bishop, but if such collaboration is not possible, a presiding priest can make those decisions in extraordinary circumstances. None of those examples affect the validity of the Sacrament.

“Perfect Love casts out fear” (1 Jn. 4:18)

I am heartbroken over the unfolding news of bishops prohibiting all public exercise of the sacraments, restricting priests from administering Anointing of the Sick or hearing confessions, and the stories from priests and laity who struggle to find meaning during this crisis. In the past, Catholics have suffered from pandemics, plagues, wars, and other social maladies that prohibited the faithful from attending Mass in a church. When those things happened, the bishops and priests went to them. It is unprecedented that in a time of crisis, so many bishops are choosing to close churches when they do not have to; or prohibit the exercise of sacraments without coercion from secular

laws or institutes. It doesn’t have to be this way. As we struggle through this difficult time, I encourage each of you to remember two things. First, each of us has an intrinsic goodness and purpose for salvation that is tied to our being made in the Image and Likeness of God. Do not let this crisis distort your participation in God’s plan. Whether one is a bishop, priest, deacon, religious, or lay, how we choose to respond will become either a source of Love or fear for those who witness our example. Whether you write a letter to your bishop as I have done or choose to encourage others with prayer and words of kindness (which I have also done) act with Love. If you do, that Love will drive away the fear that surrounds you. Love will bring clarity to what God expects of you.

Finally, be encouraged by the example of the Japanese Catholics. When Toyotomi Hideyoshi completed the reunification of Japan in the late-16th Century, he viewed Christianity as a threat. In 1587 he banned Catholicism. All priests were martyred or exiled, and for over 250 years the Japanese Christians had no sacraments except Baptism and Marriage. The laity were isolated, and it was widely believed that Catholicism had been eradicated in Japan. When Franciscan missionaries were allowed to return to the island in the mid-19th century, they found thousands of Catholics waiting to be ministered to. Miraculously, the lay Faithful of Japan had handed down the Faith of their forebears for over 250 years. The Mysteries of the Rosary had served to teach their children not only the core of the Gospel, but how to pray and how to believe. God’s grace proved sufficient to preserve the Faith in dire circumstances. His grace will prove sufficient for us today.

Each of you are very dear to me. I pray for you every day and hope to meet you either here in this life or in heaven. In this time of crisis, I remember you in a very special way. Let us remember each other. Let us join this suffering to the Cross of Jesus Christ and make it redemptive.

God bless you all; St. Joseph keep you.

Endnotes

- 1 For a brief summary of these truths, I encourage you to read the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Catechism), articles 1500 – 1510. For a fuller presentation, read the source texts for these articles.
- 2 His Eminence Mauro Cardinal Piacenza, Major Penitentiary, “*Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the current pandemic*”, 20 March 2020.



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Philip C. L. Gray
President

Dear Friends,

“Grace to you, and peace from Him Who was, Who is, and Who is to come” (Rev. 1:4).

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36; RSVCE).

When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth (Lk. 18:8)?

As I wrote the lead article for this issue, the Vatican was preparing two documents to be issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship (CDW) and the Apostolic Penitentiary (AP), and Cardinal Burke was writing his own letter to the faithful in the world. In its document, the CDW gave express directive that Easter would not be commuted and all Holy Week celebrations must occur as scheduled. The document goes on to explain what should take place if these celebrations occur *sine populo*, without the people. The document does not address the moral dilemma of whether a priest should offer Mass *sine populo* in these difficult times; it merely implies that such is the case. In its document, the AP announces special plenary indulgences available to those who suffer from the coronavirus, those who minister to them with physical contact and care, and those who minister to them spiritually. In the AP’s document, it is noteworthy to point out that while the usual conditions of receiving Holy Communion and Absolution to receive the plenary indulgence remain, those obligations are relaxed in that a person is only expected to fulfill these tasks “*as soon as possible*”. In fact, a daily plenary indulgence can be obtained by those who pray a Rosary, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, or other noted prayers and offers the prayers “*to implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself*” (Please see page 8 for the text of this Decree). Cardinal Burk focused on something different.

In our totally secularized culture, there is a tendency to view prayer, devotions and worship like any other activity, for example, going to the cinema or to a football game, which is not essential and therefore can be cancelled for the sake of taking every precaution to curb the spread of a deadly contagion. But prayer, devotions and worship, above all, Confession and the Holy Mass, are essential for us to remain healthy and strong spiritually, and for us to seek God’s help in a time of great danger for all.... We bishops and priests need to explain publicly the necessity of Catholics to pray and worship in their churches and chapels, and to go in procession through the streets and ways, asking God’s blessing upon His people who suffer so intensely.

In reflection on the crisis, I urge each of you who are reading this letter to join together in praying a daily Rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy for the intentions noted in the AP’s Decree. Those laity who can, please attend Mass and Confession. If you are a priest or bishop, please, find ways to offer Mass **WITH** the people, especially during Holy Week. It is your duty. Faith is a gift from God. Use it. Hope is a gift we offer. Give it. Love casts out all fear. Be moved by Love.

I love you all! God bless you; St. Joseph keep you!

Peace,

Philip C. L. Gray
President

PS: For copies of any document noted in this letter, the links are found on our website. Or call 1-800-MY FAITH (693-2484). We’ll send it to you.

Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic

The Church, following the example of her Divine Master, has always had the care of the sick at heart. As Saint John Paul II points out, the value of human suffering is twofold: “It is supernatural because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission” (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 31).

Pope Francis, too, in these recent days, has shown his paternal closeness and renewed his invitation to pray incessantly for those who are sick with the Coronavirus.

So that all those who suffer because of COVID-19, precisely in the mystery of this suffering, may rediscover “the same redemptive suffering of Christ” (*ibid.*, 30), this Apostolic Penitentiary, *ex auctoritate Summi Pontificis*, trusting in the word of Christ the Lord and considering with a spirit of faith the epidemic currently underway, to be lived in a spirit of personal conversion, grants the gift of Indulgences in accordance with the following disposition.

The *Plenary Indulgence* is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father’s intentions), as soon as possible.

Health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine Redeemer: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn 15: 13*), will obtain the same gift of the *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions.

This Apostolic Penitentiary also willingly grants a *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions on the occasion of the current world epidemic, also to those faithful who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, to implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself.

The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the *Viaticum*, entrusting each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a *Plenary Indulgence* on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. *Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, no.12).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, Health of the Sick and Help of Christians, our Advocate, help suffering humanity, saving us from the evil of this pandemic and obtaining for us every good necessary for our salvation and sanctification.

The present Decree is valid notwithstanding any provision to the contrary.

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary,
on 19 March 2020.
Mauro Cardinal Piacenza
Major Penitentiary

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.