

PASTORAL LETTER FROM ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

19 March 2020 – The Feast of St. Joseph

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

We are living in strange and worrying times. Who would have thought that, following the natural disasters of recent months, we would now be facing the dangerous realities surrounding the coronavirus pandemic? Yet this is the new reality with which we have to live. We have to adjust our everyday patterns and lifestyle to these very challenging circumstances. I want to write personally to each person in the Archdiocese of Cardiff as we face these difficulties together, and in support of others in our local community.

Good health is a precious gift. The advance of medical science and the development of our National Health Service over the years have ensured that the quality of our lives has rightly improved. “Life is precious. Handle with Prayer” read a Wayside Pulpit some years ago. These words seem particularly relevant during the health crisis we now face. I have attached two prayers which you may find helpful to use personally whether self-isolating or trying to go about the daily business of life.

Prayer and good works are the hallmark of the follower of Jesus Christ. We do pray for all those who have been infected by the virus, especially those with underlying health conditions which make them even more prone to serious illness. As good citizens, it is essential that we heed government and medical advice, whether it be self-isolating or not gathering in big numbers in addition to undertaking the basic hygiene instructions. Working from home where possible, avoiding non-essential travel, limiting social outings. All of these measures have their place in helping to avoid infection as well as the danger of cross contamination. They may also contribute to our Lenten discipline. The 8.8 million people in this country over the age of 70 must obviously have our special care as we are particularly vulnerable in this pandemic. A significant proportion of our clergy also fit into this category. In the Church, we have a good network of outreach to the elderly, sick and housebound. At this time, the good neighbour will ensure that those living alone should be contacted and reassured that help is near at hand, should it be needed.

Bearing in mind what I have written, you will know that the Bishops of England and Wales have implemented the decision to suspend the public celebration of Mass in our churches on Sundays and Holy Days. This decision includes a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass because of the danger of these times. This cessation includes weekday Mass as well, although the priest may celebrate Mass privately without a congregation. Our churches will remain open wherever possible in order that people may use them for private prayer and devotions. The essence of these measures is that people must not gather in groups with all the dangers of cross infection this entails.

This decision has not been taken lightly, recognising that the Mass is the hallmark of Catholic faith and practice. A number of churches have the capacity to ‘live stream’ the

celebration of Mass in the absence of a congregation. It would be good to view these transmissions and join in the prayers with missals, the scriptures and other worship aids. Failing that, traditional Catholic practices such as the Prayer of the Church, Lectio Divina, the Rosary, Stations of the Cross and the desire to make a spiritual communion. These actions will join us together as members of the Mystical Body of Christ. We may be physically more separated at this time, but we remain united through faith and baptism in bonds which cannot be broken. No one is forgotten in the prayers of the Church.

I want to assure the priests and people of the Diocese of my prayers for you and your loved ones, and for your parish community. I am grateful to those who have worked hard to provide information and help not least through the Archdiocese website, social media and "The Catholic People". These days of Lent are a time of testing as we follow our suffering Lord Jesus to Calvary and beyond. The suffering of the cross to which we attach ourselves cannot be avoided in the painful circumstances of our lives. These are not of our choosing. The cross cannot be avoided. It has to be embraced in faith and lived through in order to catch a glimpse of what lies beyond. Although our celebration of this Easter may have to be more muted than in past years, the truth it celebrates will never diminish. "Life and death contended. Combat strangely ended". Our belief is that life will triumph over death. That light will conquer darkness. The words of St. John Paul II are profoundly significant at this time:

"Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song".

With every blessing

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+George Stack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+George Stack

Archbishop of Cardiff