27 March 2020

DECREE

Coronavirus Update #2, Extended Suspension of Mass and Public Gatherings

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

As the COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic increases across the USA and various parts of the world, I am reminded of the Lord’s words in Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear: I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” As a Church and individual families, with greater prayer and fervor we turn to Christ as a source of strength amidst challenge, confusion and difficulty.

On March 17, 2020 (PN BCZ 20/06), I issued a decree to suspend public celebration of Masses and all Church gatherings. It came with extreme anguish of heart, mind and soul. I have repeatedly preached about the gift of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and to have to suspend the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass comes with great difficulty. I and the priests have shared the thirst we have for the smiling faces and prayerful responses of the faithful at Mass to return very soon.

Given the current mandates by Governor Dunleavy due to the increase of COVID-19 throughout the State of Alaska, all schools will be closed until May 1. In keeping with this decision and that of all the Region XII bishops, the following will be effective immediately until May 1 for the Diocese of Fairbanks:

- The suspension of public Masses and all other gatherings. Please pray that public gatherings will resume soon as it is safe to do so.
- All remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. We are reminded to “keep holy the Lord’s Day.”
- Priests will continue to offer daily private Mass and are encourage to livestream when possible.
- The public celebration of Holy Week liturgies are suspended. These liturgies will be live-streamed from the Cathedral and those parishes that have the capability.
- For those to be baptized and receive Full Communion into the Church at the Easter Vigil will be postponed until public Masses are resumed. Each parish will determine the time and date.
- First Holy Communion and Confirmations are postponed until after public Masses resume.

I realize this is extremely disappointing and I ask that the sacrifices that all make be united to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross. Please pray for our health care workers, supermarket employees and countless individuals who daily expose themselves to the threat of the Coronavirus to provide essential services.
Parishes are encouraged to open their church buildings for individual prayer, adoration, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and confessions while maintaining physical distancing and other precautionary measures that health officials have recommended to minimize the threat.

I ask that you join me in prayer asking Our Lady of Guadalupe to intercede for us during this pandemic. Be assured that all of you are in my daily rosary and Mass intentions. May our hunger for the Eucharist and other Sacraments be a source of grace to strengthen our faith.

Sincerely in Christ,

†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks

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