

March 24, 2020

Statement on the Care of Souls and the Forgiveness of Sins During this Pandemic in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis

The following directives are being issued by the archdiocese, including those things decreed within the normal law by Most Rev. Charles C. Thompson, Archbishop of Indianapolis:

The necessary and prudent measures enacted by government officials to prevent and slow infection rates during this current pandemic come with a great many sacrifices. As in all areas of life, these measures also affect the Church in her mission for the care of souls. The faithful have been overwhelmingly understanding in adapting to the restrictions of public gatherings and the temporary cessation of public Masses by attending Eucharistic celebrations virtually and participating in spiritual communion. Another crucial aspect of the spiritual life is the forgiveness of sins, which is ordinarily accomplished through individual and integral confession to a priest followed by individual absolution.

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson suspended the public celebration of the Mass as well as all other liturgical services and gatherings of the faithful and that was effective Wednesday, March 18 and until further notice. This resulted in the cancelation of many Penance Services and group gatherings for confession in our archdiocese. One of the guiding principles in all decision-making is to try to encourage people to stay home for their own safety. In fact, now a stay at home order has been given by the governor that is effective on March 24 at 11:59 pm. The reality of our situation is dangerous and unsafe for many right now. If regularly scheduled opportunities for confession were hosted, then that would create opportunities for people to put themselves in harm's way by potentially putting them in dangerous contact with others. In our statement from March 17, priests were instructed on how to

respond to minister to individuals who are in danger of death and to administer Last Rites. It was also indicated that they may respond to individual requests for confession but with the caveat that those who can be encouraged to postpone that celebration of the Sacrament of Penance should be strongly encouraged to do so. Ways need to be found for people to be cared for spiritually but also to keep them and their priests safe physically. This will create some instances where an individual is not able to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance in some of the days ahead. And so, at this time priests and penitents are reminded of the Church's teaching in these cases. When a person finds themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution because they can't connect with confession, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, (1) flowing from their love of God, (2) expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (like praying the act of contrition) and (3) with the intention to go to sacramental confession as soon as it is offered, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452)."

The current pandemic and the measures taken to combat it make responding to individual requests for confession very difficult. Therefore, out of great concern for the health of our people and until further notice requests for individual confession should be postponed unless it is requested by one who is in imminent danger of death. The guidelines of the statement from March 17 regarding ministering to those in danger of death remain in force. For all others, they are to be asked to rely on perfect contrition described in the three steps above.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson may, in the current situations, determine that the circumstances warrant the use of the third form of the Rite of Penance, often called "general absolution." However, it has been determined that this scenario has not yet presented itself, and this form may not be utilized at this time. Not having the opportunity for individual confession or general absolution will make some of the faithful anxious, especially during this Lenten season of penance. To help in this, the Holy See, through the Apostolic Penitentiary, has offered this additional recourse for the faithful:

- “The gift of special Indulgences is granted to the faithful suffering from COVID-19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.”
 - This is a time of suffering, especially for those who have contracted COVID-19. As such, it may be a time for us to “rediscover ‘the same redemptive suffering of Christ’ (*Salvifici doloris*, 30).” Trusting in Christ, a *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 fulfill 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.”
 - An indulgence is “the expression of the Church's full confidence of being heard by the Father when - in view of Christ's merits and, by his gift, those of Our Lady and the saints - she asks him to mitigate or cancel the painful aspect of punishment by fostering its medicinal aspect through other channels of grace” (John Paul II, *General Audience, September 29, 1999*).
 - A plenary indulgence removes all the temporal punishment due to sin (*CCC*, 1471).

Promotion and catechesis on these remedies during the absence of the sacrament of reconciliation can be a source of great

consolation for all the faithful. A short catechesis on how the faithful can participate in both the indulgence and the act of perfect contrition will be coming shortly to the USCCB website usccb.org. For further reference, please see:

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/20/200320d.html>

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/20/200320c.html>