

I would like to visit with you a little bit about the measures we are taking regarding the present crisis with the Coronavirus.

Let's begin with a prayer:

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Lord we ask your blessings on us today. Help us always with your ever-present mercy and love, that we might know the path you have marked out for us and have the courage to follow after you. We pray through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and St. Joseph, Protector of the Church.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

In these difficult days I am reminded of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable, a man fell victim to robbers, and they left him for dead. I imagine that man in the road ditch, beaten and bruised, broken and bloody. It seems like we too are under attack from a disease that we are struggling to understand and contain. It affects us on all levels and turns our world upside down. We truly feel beaten and bruised ourselves.

The parable continues however, revealing the Good Samaritan who, in his great compassion and care for the injured man, loves him with a real love as he bends down to comfort him, to pour healing ointment into his wounds. No doubt, the injured man pushes back against this kindness, having a vivid memory of his last contact with human beings, which were blows to his body, he attempts to fight back. So too, we are restless, we are angry and we are hurt. The confusion is

overwhelming. We want to fight back, to protect ourselves and push away friend and foe as well. Yet, I imagine the Good Samaritan to be Jesus himself.

Jesus gentle but firmly reassures us. “Lie still now,” I hear him saying, “I am here. I will help you. Lay still.” Our faith reminds that the truth of these words ... our faith reminds us of the truth of these words. Jesus is still with us in these days of difficulty. He urges us to trust in his presence; to know that we will be taken care of. Jesus invites us to accept his presence and his healing. We don’t know exactly how that healing will take place or when. We are invited to trust that Jesus has this situation in hand, and if we trust in him, we will be brought to safety and wholeness of life once again.

I ask everyone in the Diocese of Rapid City to open themselves to this trust and the ever present and merciful God which is revealed to us in His Son Jesus. These days invite us to a much deeper walk with him, a profound trust and limitless hope. Even as we face the measures, we are taking to be prudent, I would invited you to allow the confusion, frustration and fear to give way, because Jesus is with us.

Today, Bishop DeGrood of the Sioux Falls Diocese and I issued a joint statement speaking to the further measures that we will take in the face of the epidemic. Bishop DeGrood and I are in regular communication and will continue talking to one another. We will do our best to keep you posted as events continue to unfold.

Given the encouragement of civil authorities right now to suspend all gatherings exceed more than ten persons, I am suspending the public celebration of all Masses both Sunday and daily in the Diocese of Rapid City. I will celebrate a Mass Sunday morning, March 22nd praying for our diocese and all of you. This Mass will be livestreamed with only a few necessary ministers present. I ask all priests in the diocese to offer Mass privately on Sunday in their parishes for their own parish communities.

This might seem contrary to my first remarks about Jesus being present to us. Some would argue that we are taking away our strongest spiritual weapon in this present struggle. Jesus is truly present to us in the celebration of the Mass and to not have that opportunity seems like we are avoiding Jesus' healing touch. Yet I would remind you, that at the heart of our celebration of the Mass is our willingness to unite ourselves to the death and resurrection of Jesus. We can do that whenever we participate in the celebration of the Mass even if it is via social media. The sacrifice of Jesus to God the Father and the reception of new life from God the Father given back to his Son Jesus is a true reality. We join in that sacrifice of redemption in our consciously make a decision to participate as fully in the Mass as we are able to do. In this way we can and will continue to pray the Mass and allow its fruit to grace us.

In addition, we can pray for a spiritual communion with the Lord. Yes, this is not the same as the real union we experience in the reception of communion, but we must remember that although God uses the sacraments in a powerful way, God is not bound by them. In our desire for communion with the Lord, we can know that

that union is given to us by our God who loves and desires that we be united with him. This prudent decision cooperating with civil authorities and best guidance of medical professional to help prevent the spread of this disease, invites us to a new and dare I say, renewed appreciation of our need to allow Jesus to heal our wounded lives.

I ask that all parish churches remain open during day light hours unless there is a danger of vandalism, so the faithful can come to the church and pray privately. I ask you to monitor yourselves and ensure that the number of people visiting the parish church does not exceed the number of persons allowed by the Center for Disease Control guidelines to gather at one time and one place. In smaller parishes this might be only two or three at a time to allows distance from one another, but in larger parishes more people can gather as long as we observe the limits of the CDC guidelines. Those parishes that have regularly scheduled adoration are encouraged to continue this with these guidelines in place.

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of devotional prayers that can be accessed via prayer books or online. Use this treasury and allow the Lord to speak to you and be present with you in your private prayers, either at home or in a visit to your parish church. I would especially commend to your attention the praying of the rosary. Our Blessed Mother was given to the Church by her Son and she is, in the recent feast announced by Pope Francis, Mary, Mother of the Church. She is also our Perpetual Help. Through the rosary and other tried and tested Marian prayers, we know that her intercessions will be carried to her Son, and that her son will seek to heal his wounded people.

I also encourage us to ask for the intercession of St. Joseph who is the Protector of the Church. As he protected Jesus in his early life on earth, so too he will protect the Church, the body of Christ on earth today. Pray to St. Joseph for his intercession.

I encourage the praying of the Divine Mercy Chaplet. This powerful prayer reminds us over and over again as we pray it, that Jesus desire to shower his mercy upon us. We certainly need that at this time.

In addition to the suspension of all Masses, all other diocesan events will be canceled until further notice. We are planning right now to livestream the Chrism Mass, again with only necessary ministers present so that those who desire can participate.

Regarding activities and events in the parishes, I will be sending out a separate memorandum to the priests of the diocese so I would encourage you if you have questions or concerns to call or email you pastor or associate pastor to understand the status of the activities and events that are planned in your own parishes.

In these days, attention needs to be turned as well, to those who are poor and vulnerable. The impact of our economy is felt by all of us. We need to be aware and sensitive to those who are less fortunate. Assisting in providing food for those whose livelihood is impaired by this crisis and are struggling is essential. The

various civic agencies that oversee and assist people in these matters might will need our help with resources and time. Again, with due prudence and caution, we are all invited to give and respond to the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

We are indeed like the man lying in the ditch. We are beaten and bloodied, bruised and broken. However, Jesus is with us. He is present inviting us to trust in his love. He will lead us to the inn where he will care for us and restores us to the fullness of our lives. He has not, and he will not abandon us. May God bless you bless my brother priests and deacons as we walk together through these days.