

Friends,

May the peace of Christ be with you! Like most of you, I too am a bit confused and even uneasy with the still mysterious reality known as COVID-19 (*coronavirus*). Over these days, my prayer continually returns to the Exodus experience of God's chosen people in the Old Testament and the heroic and silent faith of St. Joseph in the New Testament. Both of these images call for radical faith in God at work through human beings. God worked *in* and *through* Moses and St. Joseph to fulfill his divine plan of freedom and salvation over two thousand years ago. God still works *in* and *through* human beings today and our Lord invites us to have bold confidence in this reality. That being said, I humbly ask that you continue to pray for Pope Francis, Bishop Taylor, myself and all ordained ministers as we strive to provide for our flock's spiritual wellbeing while doing what is in our control to protect the physical wellbeing of that same flock, especially the most vulnerable among us. Pray also for our medical professional who are risking their own wellbeing to ensure the health of those who are infirmed.

In this week's bulletin, you will find a letter from the bishop with guidelines for moving forward. I have prayerfully discerned how to implement these policies and have done my best to lay out how these apply to us, all points being effective immediately:

1. The Sunday Mass obligation has been dispensed for all Catholics, effective immediately. The bishop holds the canonical right and authority to make this pastoral decision.
2. All Masses are cancelled. This includes Sunday and daily Masses. At the pastor's discretion, Masses in small groups may be held.
3. All parish gatherings are canceled for March and April. This includes, but is not limited to: Faith Formation, youth ministry, bible studies, V-Encuentro, the Vincentians.
4. Anointing of the Sick and Communion to the Sick will only be done by the pastor and only in cases emergencies.
5. The church will be open daily for personal prayer from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm. The chapel will remain open 24-hrs a day.
6. All are encouraged to take home a *Word Among Us* book and/or a *missalette* so that you may pray with the daily Mass readings. Daily Mass readings are also available online at www.usccb.org under the "Daily Readings" tab on the righthand side of the page.
7. Each day, I will celebrate a private Mass at the church that will be made available on Facebook. You will hear the readings, I will give a homily and then we will pray together as I celebrate the Eucharist. Although this will be a digital participation in the Mass, God's actual graces are still present. He is not bound by space or time, only hard hearts. I highly encourage you and your family to participate in these each day.
8. More information will be provided as time goes on. Please read the parish emails and regularly check the parish Facebook page and web site (www.stmarysbatesville.com) for updates and spiritual resources.

St. Therese of Lisieux humbly declares that true sainthood is not obtained by our personal will-power and self-reliance, but rather by God's grace. Receiving the fullness of his grace and mercy requires our heroic abandonment. Just before her saintly death, she wrote, *Jesus does not ask for great actions, but only for abandonment and gratefulness*. In these days, our heroic desires can be tainted by ignorance and imprudent decisions. The greatest thing we can do is to be patient and trust in our Lord. In a very real way, we are being invited to gratefully abandon our own self-reliance and are called to trust those God has set apart to lead us through this desert of uncertainty. We must trust our spiritual leaders for our spiritual wellbeing and medical professionals for our physical wellbeing. The greatest way to show our abandonment is to gratefully follow their lead, humbling recognizing that they too are journeying through the very same desert! In a letter to her mother superior, St. Therese wrote: *Oh Mother, how many worries does one free oneself of by making the vow of obedience!* A great Lenten practice for all of his in these remaining weeks of Lent would be a total abandonment of our own self-reliance. We do that most perfectly through a total, heartfelt abandon of trust in our Heavenly Father. God bless.

At your service in the love of Christ through Mary and Joseph,

Fr. Stephen Gadberry

P.S. If you are not receiving parish emails, you may go to www.stmarysbatesville.com and sign up.