

The Lord is our refuge, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1)

March 20, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ:

In these extraordinary times of disruption caused by the efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus, God is our shelter and our strength. I want you to know that you are in my prayers, thoughts, and concern, and those of our cluster parish and school staffs.

This is not the Lenten penance we chose, but it is what God has chosen for us. Like Jesus, we take up our cross and follow in His footsteps. We are separated in body but have the opportunity to be more deeply united in the Spirit. This too shall pass and we are in God's good care.

The purpose of this letter is to reach out with that message of hope and reassurance, as well as to inform you of some aspects of how our parish life will adapt in the time when the public celebration of Mass and Lenten devotions is suspended.

Regarding Updates:

It is hard to reach everyone reliably. Please check your parish's website and the Holy Spirit FaceBook page (<https://www.FaceBook.com/HolySpiritStCloud>) for the weekly bulletin and other information. I strongly encourage you to sign up for the **myParish** app hosted by the Diocese of St. Cloud on your smartphone; go to the App Store (iPhones) or Google Play (Androids) for this free app to get the latest news and multiple spiritual resources.

Regarding Masses:

All public Masses and Holy Week liturgies (those with a congregation) are suspended through April 13, 2020. Scheduled Mass intentions will be honored at private Masses.

The televised Mass for the Diocese is available at <http://worship.stcdio.org/tv-mass>; you will also find the schedule of channels and times the Mass is aired.

We will live-stream liturgies in our cluster as follows:

Sunday Mass at 10:00 a.m. (March 22, March 29, April 5)

Holy Thursday (April 9) at 5:00 p.m.

Good Friday (April 10) at noon

Easter Sunday (April 12) at 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

Weekday Masses (Monday through Friday) at 10:00 a.m.

Blessed palms will be available after Palm Sunday during the prayer times listed below.

Access these liturgies at <https://www.holyspiritstcloud.net>.

All Catholics are dispensed from the Sunday obligation until further notice. Private and family prayer, reflection on the Sunday Scriptures, and the televised Mass are urged. The TV Mass, readings for each day, and many suggested prayer resources are posted at www.stcdio.org.

Regarding Confessions:

AT THIS TIME, Confessions will be available on Saturdays from 3:00-4:00 p.m. at St. Anthony's and Holy Spirit. There will be no communal Penance Services but confessions will be heard during the scheduled times for those services:

- Monday, March 23, 6:30 p.m. at St. Anthony's in the Parish Center (former school – follow the signs)
- Thursday, March 26, 6:30 p.m. at St. John Cantius
- Sunday, March 29, 3:30 p.m. at Holy Spirit

We ask that you observe social distancing of at least six feet while waiting for confession.

The availability of Confession may change – check website for updates.

Regarding Prayers and Devotions:

While the public Stations of the Cross and Holy Hours are cancelled, the churches will be open for individual prayer as follows. ***We ask you to observe social distancing of at least six feet from others in prayer, and to observe silence to respect others' prayers.***

St. Anthony's

M-F, 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (*Note: Confessions at 3:00 p.m. at St. Anthony's*)

Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Blessed Sacrament will be moved from Adoration Chapel into the main church; scheduled Adorers only after 7:00 p.m.

St. John Cantius

Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (use side entrance)

We direct you to St. Anthony's as above during the week.

Holy Spirit

M-F, noon to 5:00 p.m.

Saturday: we direct you to St. Anthony's as above. *Note: Confessions at 3:00 p.m. at Holy Spirit.*

Sunday, noon to 5:00 p.m.

You are also encouraged to pray at home; God hears us whenever we call upon Him.

Having to abstain from the Eucharist for a time is a great sorrow; it can help us appreciate the many Catholics in our world who live with this situation daily due to persecution, lack of clergy, times of war, imprisonment, and other causes. While the Sacraments are of inestimable value as the ordinary channels of grace, the *Catechism* reminds us that "God is not Himself bound by His sacraments" to bestow these graces (see n. 1257) when their reception is not possible. For now, you can make a Spiritual Communion:

Make an Act of Faith: *O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches because you have revealed them who are eternal truth and wisdom, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. In this faith I intend to live and die. Amen.*

Make an Act of Spiritual Communion: *My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You.*

Other Considerations:

The financial impacts of COVID-19 are unknown but sure to be substantial. I understand the uncertainty and the added burdens on many household budgets. I offer a gentle reminder that your parish still needs your support. The best way to offer this right now is to drop your contribution in the mail. Thank you for whatever you are able to do.

During this time, balance the need to remain informed with calm vigilance. Don't overdose on stress and become obsessed with newsfeeds. If you now have unexpected time due to cancellations, use it to spiritual advantage: read the Bible, pray the Rosary, sit in silence with God. Take time to write long-delayed letters, call a friend, play a game or cards with your family, just talk with one another.

Go into that list of "some day when I have some time I will ..." and select a meaningful work of mercy. Check on neighbors and friends, especially the elderly.

Offer particular prayers for those on the front lines in health care, public health, law enforcement, government, and other vital services that we often take for granted.

Perhaps it can still be a Lent of Gratitude when our plans change and God grants us the gift of Time.

My daily prayers, and the work of salvation by God, continue. *Fr. Tom*