Te Huinga o ngā Pīhopa Katorika o Aotearoa
New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

28 March 2020

Pastoral Letter to the Catholic People from the Bishops of Aotearoa New Zealand regarding Covid-19

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we begin these weeks of lockdown in Aotearoa New Zealand, we are deeply aware of the shared sacrifice for the protection of our families, workplaces and the wider community both local and international. In these weeks the safety of all people is our primary concern. We are unable to leave our homes and must remain isolated from everyone other than those with whom we live.

The current restrictions prevent priests from leaving their homes, even to minister to the sick and dying, and therefore the sacraments of the church are unavailable to parishioners. This an especially great suffering for both priests and people, unprecedented in our lifetime.

But this lack of availability of the sacraments is not unknown in the history of the Church in our land. Before the arrival of the first priests in Aotearoa in 1838, Catholic faith was growing in New Zealand with families and small communities of Catholics living with the strong desire for the sacraments of Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, and Anointing that they were not yet able to celebrate. Even following the arrival of priests many of our Catholic ancestors still found themselves unable to participate in the Mass because of distance, but they embraced the mission of forming their families in faith with daily prayer together and ensuring that the scriptures and the lives of the saints were read for personal formation and shared with their children.

In these days we hear that many of you are praying more regularly in your homes using every means of support available, especially online streaming of the Mass and Stations of the Cross, reading the scriptures privately or with your families and praying the Rosary and other devotional prayers. We are inspired by your generous response to this unexpected Lenten penance and we are excited by the evidence that Christ is meeting you in your "closed room."

God always provides for his people. The sacraments, which are the primary communicators of the life of God within the Church, are not the origin of grace, nor do they have a monopoly on it. God is the origin of all grace and God freely chooses to reward virtue, good intentions and actions.

In these extraordinary days of lockdown, when we are unable to receive the sacraments we desire (Eucharist, Reconciliation or Anointing), the Vatican, following the leadership of Pope Francis has communicated how we may obtain the graces usually given through these sacraments.

The healing and grace of these sacraments and more is still available to you, directly and without the sacraments through a Plenary Indulgence. This is the beauty of what was offered throughout history by Indulgences, before our understanding of these communicators of grace was corrupted by misuse.

This is a beautiful opportunity to know the mercy, forgiveness and love of Jesus Christ. How we might receive these graces is detailed on the appended last page: *When you cannot receive the Sacraments because of Quarantine.*

The Church has always responded to people in times of need with extraordinary generosity and mercy. This is true in these days, with the Indulgence offered not only to those in danger of death, but to all people who seek to rekindle their relationship with Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church.

Finally, we must remind you, please stay true to the spirit and the letter of the restrictions. Unless you work in an essential industry, or need to visit a supermarket, a doctor or a chemist, do NOT break this lockdown. Stay in your own household. Do not let visitors enter.

At the heart of our faith is the fact that in Jesus, God comes to us. We do not have to leave home to find God. In these days, in Jesus, God is coming to us, seeking to encounter us in the confines of our own homes.

Your parish priests are available to give counsel via the telephone and online. Mass is being celebrated online, with links available from your parish websites, or this special National Liturgy Office page:

www.nlo.org.nz/news-and-events/media-releases/celebrate-mass-online/

Lent is traditionally a time of sacrifice, but we are usually free to choose what we will do and not do for Lent. This Lent, so much has changed unexpectedly, depriving us of many freedoms. An unexpected penance has been imposed from outside. Yet these next few weeks of lockdown offer us an unprecedented and extraordinary opportunity for growth. Let us unite in embracing this opportunity to grow together seeking greater maturity in faith in Jesus Christ within the Catholic Church.

Yours in Christ,

Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland and NZCBC President
Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton and NZCBC Secretary
John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington, NZCBC Vice President
Paul Martin SM, Bishop of Christchurch
Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin
Michael Gielen, Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland

- **Following page:** *When you cannot receive the Sacraments because of Quarantine*

When you cannot receive the Sacraments because of Quarantine

On 20 March 2020, The Apostolic Penitentiary issued a statement for people affected by the Covid-19 lockdown. It gave a way (a Plenary Indulgence) for those in danger of death to be forgiven their sins and to be readied for eternity. The extract below clarifies the necessary steps to prepare for and to receive this abundant mercy of God.

For those unable
to receive the sacraments
(for example, Mass, Reconciliation):

do any one of the following:

- unite spiritually in Mass online, OR
- read the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, OR
- recite the Holy Rosary, OR
- do the Way of the Cross, OR
- recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy,

to implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself, and to pray for the Holy Father's intentions.

And have the intention of going to sacramental confession and holy communion once these things are possible.

For those who are sick:

- recite the Creed and
- pray the Lord's Prayer and
- pray the Hail Mary, or other prayer invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and
- pray for the intentions of the Holy Father

offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the intention of going to sacramental confession and holy communion, once these things are possible.

For those who are dying:

This indulgence is granted to them, provided that they are well disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime. The recommendation is that the dying person be given a crucifix to hold or to look at.