

Fukuoka, May 22, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters:

The peace of the Lord be with you all.

Supported by the prayer of all of you, I took canonical possession of the Diocese of Fukuoka on May 17. Because of the situation created by COVID-19, we had to restrict attendance to a small number of representatives. I appreciate the understanding you showed regarding this measure. I hope that when the situation is back to normal, we can all celebrate a mass of thanksgiving together.

After the liturgy of the inauguration, we had a meeting of the diocesan Council in which we discussed the theme of the resumption of liturgical celebrations. Although the declaration of a state of emergency has been suppressed in the three provinces that comprise our diocese, much attention must be paid to prevent the further spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Both the Japanese government and the governors of our provinces are insisting on it.

In these circumstances, it seemed to us that the time had come to resume public liturgical celebrations and the various activities of the church. For this reason, after hearing the opinion of the diocesan council and some experts whom I have consulted, I have decided to resume the public celebration of mass and the other activities of the church. In any case, I insist that you take all the precautions that the authorities are advising. Thus:

1. I ask that the public celebration of Mass be resumed from June 1.
2. As of June 1, other parish activities may be resumed, always taking care of compliance with the rules given by the competent authorities. I leave it to the parish priests to decide when and how to resume these activities.
3. Regarding the public celebration of the Mass, keep in mind the following points:
 - ① Avoid celebrating in places without sufficient ventilation, maintain physical distance between people and avoid crowded gatherings.
 - ② Take care of these three aspects among the servants of the liturgy (altar servers, readers, etc.).
 - ③ Disinfect your hands with alcohol and wear masks.
 - ④ Ensure adequate ventilation of the church.
 - ⑤ Do not fill the baptismal font or the holy water containers with water.

- ⑥ For a time still avoid singing during celebrations.
 - ⑦ Cancel the procession of the offerings.
 - ⑧ Put the hosts for the celebrant and those of the faithful in different containers.
 - ⑨ Properly cover the chalice and the coupon with the hosts for the faithful during the Eucharistic prayer.
 - ⑩ Before distributing communion, both the priest and the Eucharistic ministers wash their hands properly.
 - ⑪ During this time meals will be suppressed after the celebrations.
4. Regarding the number of participants in the celebrations, bearing in mind the difference that exists between the different parishes, try to avoid crowds. You can think, for example, of:
- ① Increase the number of Masses, distributing the assistance according to the areas of the parish.
 - ② If this is not possible, you can even think about determining attendance at Sunday mass on alternative Sundays according to the areas.
 - ③ Try to support each other within each area of the diocese or contact the diocesan secretariat to find the most appropriate solution.
 - ④ There will surely be other ways to organize. Whatever the solution adopted, avoid closed places and crowds and keep the physical distance between people.

I am sure that it will be a great joy for everyone, after so long without being able to participate in the celebration of Mass, to be able to meet again, listen to the Word of God and receive the Eucharist. However, I ask that no recklessness be committed. If someone is not feeling well, avoid attending mass. In this case, you have no obligation to attend Sunday mass. Similarly, if a priest is feverish or experiences a persistent cough, stop celebrating Mass for the faithful. In this case, they are exempt from the obligation of Sunday mass.

We pray for all the people affected by COVID-19; for those who have become ill, for those who care for them, for those who have been relegated to very difficult situations and for the eternal rest of those who have died. I ask the Lord to see soon the end of this pandemic. May the Lord bless you. Fraternaly,

Josep M. Abella
Bishop of Fukuoka