

26 March 2020

**Official Notice from Catholic Diocese of Fukuoka
on Further Suspension of Public Masses due to the Spread of COVID-19
and Guideline for Living Holy Week**

Dear brothers and sisters in Diocese of Fukuoka,

I imagine that you are spending the days with prayers to our Lord, amidst of this difficult and restless situation due to COVID-19.

As you are aware, the situation of COVID-19 is not getting any better and infections due to COVID-19 has become widespread and serious on a global level, while situations are varied according to regions.

In Japan, as well as in Fukuoka Diocese, the number of the novel coronavirus infectious cases is increasing day by day. This is very painful reality which we need to accept as it is.

From this kind of circumstance, I would like to invite you all to share the way of living as followers of Christ. Also, with much pain, I would like to ask your cooperation with your best efforts for a termination of this COVID-19 epidemic. Let us be united in our thoughts and actions which are helpful and necessary to prevent further spread of COVID-19.

As we continue our journey of Lent, we hope to bring back our “usual” Holy Week. However, aren’t we invited to take a courageous step to get out of our “usual” way of living for this year’s celebration? It is indeed a painful and distressing step. It seems like an experience of “Exodus” for us, people of God of today. We need to continue journeying towards a promised land, which is unseen yet certain.

For this, we, the diocese of Fukuoka, have decided to take following measures. I ask all the faithful to take the following decisions seriously.

1. Suspension of Public Masses will be extended until 30th April, 2020. During this period, all the faithful under Diocese of Fukuoka will be dispensed from the obligation to participate in the Mass on Sundays. It is advisable for each parish to distribute leaflet for Sunday Mass to the faithful.

⇒ I once again ask all the priests in the diocese to celebrate masses individually in spiritual communion with each community and the faithful, with great ardor and carrying hearts of the faithful.

2. As for Holy Week, there will be no gathering as a community, and liturgies of Holy Week will be celebrated by each priest individually. Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday can be celebrated at seminaries, houses for clergy, and monasteries, aside from Cathedral and parishes. Please include a special intention for the suffering world due to COVID-19 in the Universal Prayer on Good Friday. The Easter Vigil can be celebrated only at Cathedral and parish churches. Main pastor of every parishes is requested to inform the parishioners about the beginning times of the celebrations and invite them to pray in communion from each one's residence. For this, each priest is asked to follow the decree, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments on March 25.

3. Where a baptism ceremony is previewed at Easter, please reschedule it on a date, where a community can celebrate together, after Public Mass will be resumed.

4. We will postpone the Chrism Mass, scheduled on 8th April 2020. New schedule will be announced later.

5. We will postpone the priesthood ordination for Rev. Ryota Funatsu, scheduled on 29th April 2020. New schedule will be announced later.

6. Concerning weddings and funerals, please make decisions based on common sense. And when it is celebrated, kindly take adequate precautionary measures against infections.

7. For events and gatherings, please postpone or cancel them.

8. While it is difficult to have a monetary collection under this situation, please remember and support a monetary offertory for Caritas Japan during Lent Season.

9. The gift of special Indulgences is granted to the faithful in the current pandemic as follows:

- a. Plenary Indulgence is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- b. Health care workers, family members and all those who care for the sick of Coronavirus will obtain the same gift of the Plenary Indulgence under the same condition as stated above.

- c. Plenary Indulgence is also granted, with the same condition (i.e. to recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary) to the faithful who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of 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.

Taking into consideration the recent views of the government's Expert Meeting last 19 March, these decisions are made through the discussion by the council of consultors, together with counsel from Catholic medical professionals of the diocese.

Let us observe the situation with the eyes of faith, rejecting egoistic preferences. And please spend your days in considerate manners, not to create a disaster by our facile actions.

I appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

Peter Hironobu Sugihara,
Apostolic Administrator,
Diocese of Fukuoka