

March 25, 2020

To all the faithful of the Archdiocese of Osaka,

**On precautionary measures against
the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection (IV)**

+ Peace of Christ!

We have been suspending the public celebration of Masses until the end of March. We hereby announce that after this period, the following measures will be taken:

1. The suspension of public Masses in the Archdiocese of Osaka will remain in effect until Wednesday, April 8. This will be lifted on Thursday, April 9: all public Masses starting from the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday will be resumed. However, if the situation deteriorates significantly in the coming days, new directives will be announced to suspend public Masses.
2. The public celebration of Palm Sunday on April 5 will remain in suspension. However, if it is possible, priests in charge of parishes are requested to celebrate Mass with altar servers and a few numbers of lay faithful. Priests are to bless the palm branches for the rest of the parishioners and these are to be put in a place where parishioners can freely bring home at a later date.
3. The Chrism Mass and the celebration of the silver, gold, diamond, and platinum anniversaries of priestly ordination, originally scheduled on Wednesday, April 8, will be moved to Wednesday, May 20 at 11:00. The Presbyterial Council meeting (*shisai-hyogi-kai*) scheduled for 10:30 on that day will begin at 9:30 instead.
4. Regarding the liturgies of the Holy Triduum, the following changes will be applied in accordance with the decree issued on March 19 by the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of Sacraments:

a) Holy Thursday. The washing of feet, which is already optional, is to be omitted. The procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose is to be omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle.

b) Good Friday. In the Solemn Universal Prayer, the following intentions will be added (These can be downloaded from the website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan):

For the world suffering from the spread of novel coronavirus

Deacon: Let us pray also for the world suffering from the novel coronavirus pandemic. May the Lord comfort those who suffer, and free us all from the fear and anxiety we experience in the face of this disease.

(Prayer in silence. Then the Priest says:)

Celebrant: Almighty ever-living God, who is the source of our hope, we ask you for the healing of those affected by the novel coronavirus and the protection of those who work to care for the sick from contagion. May we, assured of your Presence among us, restore hope to the world now filled with anxiety and confusion. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

c) The Easter Vigil. At “The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium,” the preparation and lighting of the fire is omitted; the Paschal Candle is lit; the procession is omitted; and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) follows. The “Liturgy of the Word” then takes place.

5. The decision on whether or not Baptism takes place within the Easter Vigil liturgy is left to the discretion of each pastor in charge of parishes.

6. Other points to be taken into account:

a) The faithful who feel unwell should not participate in Mass. The same measure applies to the elderly and those with health problems. They are exempt from the Sunday obligation.

b) Priests must wash their hands thoroughly before the celebration of Mass. In the same way, both priests and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist must wash or disinfect their hands before distributing the sacred hosts.

c) Priests who have a cold, fever, or cough should not celebrate Mass in public. If the priest could not find a substitute, the public celebration of Mass could be canceled. In such a case, the faithful is exempt from the obligation to participate in the Sunday Mass.

d) Before and during Mass, open the windows of church building as much as possible to ensure good ventilation.

e) Keep some distance between people sitting in the pews. If it is possible, try to widen the space between pews by re-arranging them.

f) Use masks as much as possible during the celebration of the Mass. Readers, commentators, and altar servers can also use masks.

g) For the time being, no part of the Mass will be sung and hymns will be recited instead. The parts where the congregation usually responds, a representative alone (an emcee or commentator) will respond with a microphone. The rest of the congregation must make sure not to respond in a loud voice.

h) There will be no procession with the bread and wine at the Offertory. These will be prepared beforehand and placed on the table near the altar.

i) Place disinfectant alcohol at the entrance of the church building or parish hall for the faithful’s use.

j) For the time being, holy water fonts at the entrance of the church must be left empty and a sign prohibiting their use must be put. This is not to indicate that the holy water becomes the medium of contagion but the risk may lie with the contact people make with its container.

I ask you to circulate the directive as widely as possible to all the faithful including those from overseas. This directive in other languages will be published on the Archdiocesan website. Let us pray together for the swift end to this calamity.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Thomas Aquinas Manyo Cardinal Maeda
Archbishop of Osaka