

January 13, 2021

Dear people of the diocese

Thomas Aquinas Manyo Cardinal Maeda  
Archbishop

On precautionary measures against the spread of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)  
infection (Part 10)

+Peace of the Lord

The Christmas season has ended, and as the liturgical year has entered the ordinary time, the government declared Osaka and Hyogo prefectures of the Archdiocese of Osaka under the state of emergency. I would like to overcome this crisis with everyone.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan's GUIDELINES FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN JAPAN FOR DEALING WITH INFECTIOUS DISEASES (hereby referred to as "Guidelines") states that if a state of emergency is declared, "Masses wherein there is participation of the congregation will be cancelled." However, in this state of emergency, the maximum number of people who can hold an event is 5,000 people and the capacity is 50% or less, which is well within the scope of the measures we have asked you to take with regard to conducting public masses in the parish.

Also, please be reminded that, above all, the Sunday Mass is necessary for the church, and not a mere unnecessary and nonurgent gathering. On August 15, 2020, on Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Robert Cardinal Sarah, Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, issued a letter approved by Pope Francis, addressed to presidents of all Catholic Bishops' Conferences over the world, entitled "Let us return to the Eucharist with joy." In this letter, it is stated:

- We *cannot* live, be Christians, fully realizing our humanity and the desires for good and happiness that dwell in our hearts without the Word of the Lord, which in the celebration of the liturgy takes shape and becomes a Living Word, spoken by God for those who today open their hearts to listen;

- *We cannot live as Christians without participating in the Sacrifice of the Cross* in which the Lord Jesus gives Himself unreservedly to save, by His death, humanity which had died because of sin; the Redeemer associates humanity with Himself and leads it back to the Father; in the embrace of the Crucified One, all human suffering finds light and comfort;
- *We cannot be without the banquet of the Eucharist*, the table of the Lord which we are invited as sons and daughters to receive the Risen Christ Himself, present in body, blood, soul and divinity in that Bread of heaven which sustains us in the joys and labours of this earthly pilgrimage;
- *We cannot be without the Christian community*, the family of the Lord: we need to meet our brothers and sisters who share the sonship of God, the fraternity of Christ, the vocation and the search for holiness and the salvation of their souls in the rich diversity of ages, personal histories, charisms and vocations;
- *We cannot be without the house of the Lord*, which is our home, without the holy places where we were born to faith, where we discovered the merciful embrace that lifts up those who have fallen where we consecrated our vocation to marriage or religious life, where we prayed and gave thanks, rejoiced and wept, where we entrusted to the Father our loved ones who had completed their earthly pilgrimage;
- *We cannot be without the Lord's Day*, without Sunday which gives light and meaning to the succession of days of work and to family and social responsibilities.

Sharing this kind of feelings towards the Mass, the Archdiocese of Osaka wants to provide the faithful with the opportunity to gather at Mass with the utmost care as long as it is possible while thoroughly implementing the measures required by the national and local governments. I would like to inform everyone of the following measures:

1. On Sunday Mass in the parishes
  - a) Please be thorough in implementing the same basic measures as before (such as hand washing, wearing a mask, sufficient air ventilation,

gathering of contact information, refraining from singing, refraining from vocalization as much as possible, sitting at a distance of at least two (2) meters if possible, etc., in addition to measuring the body temperature when entering the hall).

- b) The Mass celebrant and ministers must also wear masks during the mass. However, in consideration of the hearing impaired and the elderly, if the pulpit is more than two (2) meters away from the congregation, the celebrant may need not to wear a mask during the homily.
  - c) As the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays is exempted for everyone in the parish, it is up to you to decide whether or not to attend the Mass. Please do not go to Masses in other parishes if there is no public Mass in yours.
  - d) If it is not possible to take thorough measures due to various reasons (including not only the physical aspects of the venue but also cases wherein the officers and persons-in-charge are overloaded in implementing measures), or if there are particular circumstances in each place, please suspend the public mass. In that case, as the priest "is bound on each Sunday and holyday of obligation to offer Mass for the people entrusted to him" (Code of Canon Law, Art. 534, par. 1), please offer masses for the faithful of the parish in private. Also, please devise so that the grace of the Lord's Day liturgy will reach the faithful in some way (online transmission, correspondence, etc.) possible.
  - e) If you wish to suspend the Sunday Mass in your parish, the priest-in-charge must contact the block moderator, vicar forane, and the archdiocesan curia.
2. Masses at monasteries and facilities other than the parish, and weekday masses in the parish may be implemented within the scope of thorough countermeasures, so each person-in-charge should make a decision.

3. Gatherings other than Masses should basically be canceled or postponed during the period in the parishes in Osaka and Hyogo Prefectures where the state of emergency has been declared. If absolutely necessary, take thorough prevention measures against infection such as limiting the number of people to a small number and refrain from eating and/or drinking.

Please take it seriously that the national government has issued a state of emergency at the request of the local government. Further spread of infection will cause serious damage to society as a whole, such as the collapse of medical support system, so it is necessary that we all live with a greater sense of impending crisis. Let's pray to God for the end of the infection and let us support each other through the Sunday Masses, which is the minimum necessary thing that we can do in order to sustain our church life.

\* Versions of this notice in major foreign languages will be posted on the website, one by one.