



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

March 27, 2020

Dear Faithful in the Diocese of St. Augustine,

The last few weeks have caused many difficulties as daily life has been disrupted so dramatically. Moreover, the circumstances we have experienced and will experience during the coming days may well prevent us from gathering for the Liturgies of Holy Week which lead to our celebration of Easter.

I am also aware that during the Lenten season, many seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation by attending parish penance services and partaking in regularly scheduled confessions. Regrettably, the access to the Sacrament of Penance has been considerably restricted during this Lenten season, as we continue to adhere to the national and local governments' procedures to protect the common good.

Mindful of this difficulty, as your Bishop, I wish to propose to you the other means of reconciliation, forgiveness and mercy that our Church provides for these extraordinary circumstances. Since an individual confession has become almost physically impossible, please be attentive to the following other means of reconciliation (*CIC* 960):

1. The Church envisions a pastoral situation when the faithful are unable to partake in the sacrament and yet receive God's mercy. The gift of mercy is offered when, motivated out of love for God, the faithful express sorrow for their sins through a **Perfect Act of Contrition**. This act of perfect contrition provides forgiveness for mortal and venial sins until the faithful again have the opportunity to participate in the Sacrament of Penance (*CCC* 1452)
2. Pope Francis as the Roman Pontiff has granted the plenary indulgences to the faithful in the current COVID-19 pandemic. A plenary indulgence is a remission before God of the total temporal punishment due to sin (*CIC* 992 and 993). The Holy Father granting the indulgences to those who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes; health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus; all faithful who pray for end of the epidemic as well as for those who are sick and have died as a result of the virus. In addition, Pope Francis extended plenary indulgences to Those who are unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the *Viaticum*. (Please refer to the document regarding the necessary conditions for obtaining the plenary indulgences: *Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Granting of Special Indulgences to the Faithful in the Current Pandemic* at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/20/200320c.html> or https://www.dosafl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Plenary-Indulgences_Summary_20200322.pdf)

Also, in the context of this letter, it is important to understand that the current situation lends itself for a pastoral provision of receiving the Holy Communion without prior sacramental confession (*CIC* 916): “Anyone who is conscious of grave sin should not celebrate or receive the Body of the Lord without prior sacramental confession, except for grave reason when the possibility of confession is lacking; in this case he will remember that he is bound by the obligation of making an act of perfect contrition, which includes the intention to confess as soon as possible” (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 81).

May I ask that all who wish to make “a perfect act of contrition” please do so. On this occasion make that contrition concrete by prayer for those who currently need it most or some special act of charity towards the needs of others. Then when we are able to gather for the Eucharist again, discern appropriately as to receive the Holy Communion, and as soon as possible, avail yourself to the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

It is my sincere hope that this letter brings great spiritual consolation to many. While the doors of our churches for the communal celebration of sacraments seem to be closed, no one should feel that the doors to the loving mercy and forgiveness of Christ will ever be closed.

Along with all of you, I long for the day when all our parishes can return to our usual celebrations of the sacraments. Our missing having Mass and other sacraments tells us all more about the mystery of our faith and what it means to us as the Body of Christ, the Church.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine