

Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

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Office of the Bishop

Bishop Paprocki Announces Fast from the Eucharist and asks all Priests to Celebrate Mass "*Sine Populo*"

March 18, 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The current circumstances surrounding the Novel Coronavirus are truly remarkable and unprecedented, certainly in our lifetime. As Christians, we have concern for the physical health of our families, friends, and neighbors, and we also have concerns and obligations to pray and fast on behalf of all of those impacted by this pandemic. The virus appears to present serious health risk to those who happen to be among the most vulnerable—the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. Our Lord Jesus Christ called us to a particular concern for such brothers and sisters, when he said: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

It is specifically with those most vulnerable among us in mind that I am calling for a great sacrifice in our diocese. In addition to changes announced to date, I am asking our entire diocesan community to engage together in a fast from the Eucharistic for the sake of the physical and spiritual healing of all those in our diocese, nation, and world. Prior to his election as Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, while he was Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, "Since apostolic times, no doubt, the fast from the Eucharist on Good Friday was a part of the Church's spirituality of communion. This renunciation of communion on one of the most sacred days of the Church's year was a particularly profound way of sharing in the Lord's Passion; it was the Bride's mourning for the lost Bridegroom (cf. Mk 2:20). Today too, I think, fasting from the Eucharist, really taken seriously and entered into...could lead to a deepening of personal relationship with the Lord in the sacrament."¹

As dioceses around the country are cancelling public masses in order to help stem the spread of the Coronavirus, in our Diocese, I am encouraging us to embrace this moment as a spiritual fast, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI described. During this period of fasting from the Eucharistic, we will refrain from any public celebration of the Mass or any public service, in which the Blessed Sacrament is distributed. Also, during this time, I ask the priests of our diocese to celebrate the mass "*sine populo*," that is, without a congregation, privately in their churches, during hours when the churches are closed. This includes all weekdays and Sundays, effective March 18th, 2020, continuing through the Easter Vigil and ongoing until further notice. Masses celebrated by priests *sine populo* at the Cathedral will be streamed live via the diocesan Facebook page, and I encourage all the faithful to watch one of these masses or one of the many other live masses on EWTN, Word on Fire with Bishop Barron, and other outlets. In place of receiving the Blessed Sacrament, I encourage the faithful to make a spiritual communion.

I ask our local Church to embrace this spiritual sacrifice together, with the intention of an end to the spread of the Coronavirus, for the healing of those afflicted by it, and for strength for those who are providing care for the afflicted. I also pray that this Eucharistic fast will draw us closer to our Lord and cultivate a hunger and new appreciation for the Blessed Sacrament.

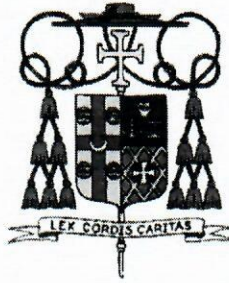
Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

¹ Behold the Pierced One (pp.97-98), Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

THOMAS IOANNES

Divina Miseratione et



Apostolicae Sedis Gratia

EPISCOPUS CAMPIFONTIS IN ILLINOIS

**DECREE SUSPENDING THE PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF HOLY MASS
AND THE SACRAMENTS WITH A CONGREGATION**

IN THE NAME OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY. AMEN.

In virtue of canon 838 §1 & §4 in the *Code of Canon Law*, I hereby suspend all celebrations of the Holy Mass and the other sacraments with a congregation immediately and until further notice. Priests are to continue to celebrate Holy Mass privately as well as the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the other sacraments individually as pastoral needs demand.

I exhort all the faithful, in these days and always, to cling to the Lord who is the source of all goodness. While the Lord has bound Himself to the sacraments, He is not bound by the sacraments and He, who is our most gracious and merciful Lord, will continue to pour His grace into the hearts of all who seek Him and His divine assistance.

Handwritten signature of Thomas John Paprocki in black ink.

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

Handwritten signature of Christopher A. House in black ink.

Very Reverend Christopher A. House, V.J.
Chancellor

Given at the Chancery in Springfield,
the 17th day of March, 2020,
the Commemoration of Saint Patrick.

Liturgical and Faith Life Changes due to Coronavirus in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

Last updated 3-18-2020

Given the unprecedented developments related to the Novel Coronavirus, our shared faith life in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is undergoing significant change. As Christians, we embrace these changes as a spiritual sacrifice on behalf of all those affected by the virus, especially in light of the particular risk posed to some of the most vulnerable among us. During this remarkable time, when many of the liturgies and public practices of the faith are on hold, Bishop Paprocki has asked us to increase, rather than decrease our prayer and fasting, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters locally, nationally, and worldwide. Below is a summary of the changes and guidelines for changes in our shared faith life. These changes, unless otherwise noted, remain in effect until further notice. It is simply not possible, at this point, to predict when public gatherings will once again be allowed.

Masses

In response to Bishop Paprocki's call for a diocesan fast from the Eucharist, effective March 18, 2020 and until further notice, Diocese of Springfield in Illinois has replaced all public Masses and liturgical celebrations with private Masses, celebrated by priests "*sine populo*," that is, with no congregation physically present. The Catholic faithful are dispensed from their Sunday obligation until further notice.

During this time, the faithful are encouraged to pray with the scripture readings of the Mass, which can be found [here](#), and watch the mass on EWTN or on one of the local, private Masses being streamed live by one of our priests. In place of reception of the Blessed Sacrament, the faithful are encouraged to make a [spiritual communion](#), pray the rosary, and to [pray this particular prayer](#) for the end to the spread of the Coronavirus, the healing of those afflicted, and strength for those caring for the sick.

Confirmations and First Communion Masses Cancelled, New Schedule to be Established

All Confirmations and First Holy Communions in the Diocese of Springfield are cancelled through December, 2020.

Given the number of Confirmations and First Holy Communions on the schedule for the next several weeks, an entirely new schedule will need to be built for the year. Further, it is not possible even to begin planning for rescheduling until there is clarity on when public gatherings will be allowed to resume. So, the entire schedule is being withdrawn, and it will be rebuilt as soon as we have clarity on how long large gatherings of people are to be suspended.

We understand that the postponement of these sacraments of initiation is deeply disappointing to all involved. We also appreciate the desire for clarity on the rescheduling, but it simply will not be possible to work it out at least for several weeks. We beg for patience as this is sorted out, as all those involved are doing the best they can in times of uncertainty and unprecedented change and disruption.

Last, all students who have prepared for Confirmation will not be required to re-do their course work and other preparation.

RCIA

Initiation into the Church will not be possible during the Easter Vigil this year. Instead, the Rite of Initiation will be rescheduled to another time this year, outside the Easter Vigil, when it is safe to resume regular public gatherings.

Weddings

Regrettably, government guidelines and mandates regarding gatherings of any kind will impact most weddings. It may be possible to celebrate a private wedding mass, in keeping with the government restrictions regarding crowd size, and reschedule the reception at a later date. If you have a wedding scheduled within the next several weeks, we encourage you to contact your parish directly. It is unclear how long restrictions will remain in place. This will make it nearly impossible to reschedule concrete dates at this point. Please recognize that pastors and parish staff are doing their best in this difficult time.

Funerals

Private funerals will continue to be offered, limited to the immediate family only, in keeping with the government restrictions regarding crowd size, with the option to schedule a public Memorial Mass at a future date. The specific dates and scheduling of Memorial Masses will not be possible at this time, given the indefinite period of restrictions on public gatherings. Please contact your parish to schedule a Mass of Christian Burial and discuss these matters with your pastor.

Baptisms

Baptisms may still be celebrated but must be celebrated privately and limited to immediate family and godparents only.

Anointing of the Sick

Clergy remain committed to caring for the sacramental needs of the faithful, especially in a time of concern. Please remember that, at this time, the Anointing of the Sick is reserved primarily for those in danger of death. Please call your parish office to request the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Non-Sacramental Parish Activities

All non-sacramental parish activities are cancelled across the diocese, until further notice.

Church Buildings Open for Private Prayer

While we encourage the faithful to adhere to guidelines of social distancing and avoidance of public spaces, etc., we also acknowledge the importance of prayer at this time. Our churches will generally remain open during normally scheduled hours for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. Please confirm hours and availability via your parish website. Also, anyone who is sick or believes he or she may have come into contact with the virus is to remain home, and anyone visiting a Church or any other public place for prayer is strongly encouraged to follow [CDC guidelines](#) for prevention and hygiene.

Confessions

While communal penance services are cancelled, individual Confessions remain available. Confessions will be heard either behind the screen or face to face with a minimum of six-foot physical separation. Please refer to your parish website for schedules and specific details. Anyone in need of confession who is sick or believes he or she may have come into contact with the virus should contact the parish office for a private visit with a priest. Further, just as with visiting churches during this time, anyone visiting a church for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is strongly encouraged to follow [CDC guidelines](#) for prevention and hygiene.

Parish Support

Amid the many concerns currently facing us, please also remember that your parish depends on your generosity and support. With the cancellation of masses, our parishes have lost offertory collections that are essential to pay staff and bills for the maintenance of our churches. Please visit your parish website and consider making your offertory gift online during this unprecedented time.

Support for those in Need

Many people will suffer disruption, health challenges, and economic hardship during this time. The faithful are encouraged to support Catholic Charities and/or their parish St. Vincent DePaul Society or other charitable groups.