

18th March 2020.

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

Religious,

Brothers and Sisters

In the wake of the Scottish Bishops releasing our Pastoral Letter in regard to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) I wish to add some further instructions for the clergy and faithful of the Diocese of Motherwell.

All public Liturgies and Devotions in our churches, oratories, halls, parish houses, or other church premises, are cancelled until further notice. Religious Communities have to decide how to manage their own spiritual programmes but should not invite people from outside to come in. This major restriction on our liturgical and devotional life will be announced at Masses tomorrow, the Feast of St Joseph, and will take effect from then across the Diocese.

During the period of restriction our churches can remain open for reasonable periods each day for private prayer. If that is so, provision must be made for people to cleanse their hands on entering and leaving the Church. Before opening a church, this facility must be provided and instructions clearly displayed. The Blessed Sacrament should not be publicly exposed for holy hours during these opening hours – the faithful can pray to and with the Lord present in our tabernacles.

Although the public celebration of our faith is being restricted, the faithful still have a right to receive the sacraments, but this will be done privately without others present. If you wish to make your confession, receive the sacrament of anointing and holy communion, please contact your Parish Priest to make arrangements for this to happen in the Church itself or at home, with the necessary hygiene precautions being observed.

Parents should wait until the restrictions end before having their children baptised, but if there is an urgent need for a baptism to go ahead only the parents and god-parents should be present. The same will be the case for marriages - the couple and two witnesses along with the celebrant. Confirmations will not take place during this period, and will be re-arranged for later in the year and this will also be the case with First Holy Communions and any outstanding First Confessions.

At Mass tomorrow, the Feast of St Joseph, at the Penitential Rite, I give all celebrants permission to celebrate the 3rd Form of the Rite of Reconciliation – General Absolution. This can only be used in exceptional circumstances, which is clearly the case at present. I recognise also that those who attend Daily Mass would

probably wish to go to Confession before Easter, and that will be difficult in the weeks ahead. By celebrating the Sacrament in this way, they are receiving the consolation of the Lord's mercy and forgiveness as they face this prolonged period without Mass and Holy Communion. If someone present at Mass tomorrow is living with grave sin they are still required to make an individual confession as soon as possible. I ask priests to carry out this instruction and to explain to the faithful the reason for celebrating the sacrament in this way. I recommend that a reasonable amount of time is allowed for

people to examine their conscience and express their sorrow communally before the absolution and to joyfully pray the Gloria in thanksgiving for the Lord's forgiveness.

With regard to the sensitive matter of funerals during this period, I instruct that the public funeral rites will be restricted to the Rite of Committal at the grave-side or crematorium. The celebrant priest, or parish priest if a deacon conducts these rites, will offer Mass for the deceased, preferably on the day of the funeral. It may be possible for a special Memorial Mass to be celebrated for the deceased person after things return to normal. Our Memorial Masses for all our deceased in November will be of special significance and poignancy this year.

As you are aware, those over 70 and those with underlying health issues are asked to be particularly cautious about their social contact with others and make appropriate restrictions in their activities. This applies also to priests, permanent deacons, religious, extraordinary ministers of the Holy Communion and other lay faithful who carry out tasks on behalf of the Church involving contact with others. All must step back from whatever ministries or tasks which involve any risks. This will be difficult, and I will have to redeploy some clergy to cover those who have to isolate in some way at present. It is also necessary also for me to consider how best to tend the sick and dying in the hospitals through this period.

As with everyone else the crisis is going to have a serious effect on our parish finances. The loss of income from our weekly Offertory Collection will be substantial and may have a lasting effect. I appeal to your continued generosity and support for our parishes and clergy. It would very helpful if you could continue to contribute weekly or monthly – through your Gift-Aid envelopes, Standing Orders or donations left in the churches. I ask Parish Priests to have boxes in prominent places in the churches to receive your contributions. I recognise that many of you are facing your own financial worries and will have to make hard choices, so I am most grateful for anything you can still contribute to the Church.

Although our public ministry is being severely restricted, the clergy are all at home and ready to do all they can to serve and comfort the faithful through this traumatic time. We will be praying also for your well-being, and that of your loved ones, especially those in most danger. Please pray for us also that we may come through

this safely. In the Bishops' message we invoked the protection of Our Lady of Lourdes, Health of the Sick, and this devotion to Our Blessed Mother is very dear to us in Motherwell Diocese, particularly at her shrine at Carfin. Although we cannot gather there in numbers, we can make private visits and I suggest we do so as we seek Our Lady's intercession in our need. St Therese of Lisieux, who died at a young age of a respiratory disease, is another saint whose intercession we should seek at

present.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

+ Joseph Toal