

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ



**Pastoral Letter for the Fourth Sunday in Lent (Laetare Sunday)
22 March 2020**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

You need no words from me to state the grave seriousness of the crisis of the spread of the coronavirus around the world and throughout this country. We know the steps and the sacrifices we must take in order to play our part in slowing its spread, saving lives and enabling the NHS to continue its vital work. These things are our duty before God.

There are other vitally important aspects of this moment in our history that are less prominent in our media and conversations.

At this moment we stand before God. That is never to be forgotten. Together we turn to God in prayer, at this moment as never before.

Our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the bedrock on which we live. Prayer is the first and loving expression of this relationship. Prayer is an acknowledgement that we are not in ultimate control of our lives or of our world. That is so clear at this time. Prayer is the recognition that our lives, individually and communally, are marked by failure and sin. Prayer is an expression of our turning to God for that grace which alone can heal us, strengthen us and give us the resolve and generosity to do all that is rightly expected of us today. Please make this a time of prayer, personally, in the family and wherever you happen to be.

The highest form of prayer is the celebration of the Holy Mass. This is at the heart of the rhythm of the life of the Church, the rhythm of prayer which sustains us all. The present crisis will not disturb that rhythm. Mass will continue to be celebrated, day by day. The prayer of the Church will continue day by day.

What will change is the manner of our participation in those celebrations of the Mass. In response to the pandemic and the official guidance, which we must follow, public participation in the celebration of the Mass is not, for now, possible. This is a sacrifice we have to make. It is not easy, for any Catholic, but it is what we must do.

I want to make it exceptionally clear that the teaching of the Church is that, in these circumstances, the obligation of attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days no longer applies. Please have no doubt about this.

This does not mean that we lose our love of the Mass or our desire to take part in the celebration of the Mass. Mass will be celebrated, day by day, in your church. There are many ways of taking part in this prayer. Associate yourself with the celebration of the Mass spiritually. Read the Scriptures of the day. Use some of the materials that are available to be close in your heart. Learn again the practice of spiritual communion. If you are helped by a visual participation in the Mass, then go to one of the websites on which that celebration is being streamed. The list of those websites is available to you.