

Office of the Bishop

Phone: (707) 566-3325

Email: BpVasa@SRDiocese.org



Diocese of Santa Rosa

P.O. Box 1297

Santa Rosa, California 95402

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THE SOLICITUDE OF THE CHURCH DURING THESE TIMES OF TRIAL: The Lord has not abandoned us!

First of all, I commend all the faithful for any efforts made to assure some electronic connection with your Church or local parish. I trust that many of you participated in broadcast Masses from your Churches or Chapels and that these provided some spiritual solace.

The necessary and prudent measures enacted by government officials to prevent and slow infection rates during this current pandemic come with a great many sacrifices. As in all areas of life, these measures also affect the Church in her mission of caring for souls. You, the faithful have been overwhelmingly understanding in adapting to the restrictions of public gatherings and the temporary cessation of public Masses. The attendance at ‘virtual’ Eucharistic celebrations and participating in spiritual communion assures an ongoing spiritual connection.

Another crucial aspect of the spiritual life is the forgiveness of sins, which is ordinarily accomplished through individual and integral confession to a priest followed by individual absolution. The current pandemic and the measures taken to combat it make this very difficult. Therefore, instructions have been issued by the Holy See (Apostolic Penitentiary) regarding methods of providing spiritual care.

Since we, in California, are operating under a stay at home policy it would be, in my view, imprudent to set up or attempt to offer the availability of individual confession even with the utilization of various protective measures. Further, the availability of suitable ‘protective masks’ and the proper use of such masks is more challenging than simply putting them on and taking them off.

The Holy See offers this in regard to the Sacrament of Confession for all the faithful:

“Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness and accompanied by the will or firm desire to confess, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1452).”

The teaching of the Church is that all sins can be forgiven by way of an Act of Perfect Contrition. Such an Act requires:

1. the love of God above all things
2. the sincere desire for forgiveness
3. the ardent commitment to receive the sacrament of reconciliation when available.

Using this information, the faithful can be assured that the mercy of Christ has not abandoned you in a time of particular need. No one will be held accountable by God for sins for which one is truly sorry and which would have been confessed, had the opportunity been present. Thus, in the present circumstances, and even without sacramental confession, the solace of the Church is offered for any who have fears or anxieties about the need for confession. Individually, or in conjunction with a virtual prayer service the faithful, by your own Act of Perfect Contrition, can receive an assurance of the forgiveness of your sins. Remember this applies when Sacramental Confession is not possible and does not, in any way, diminish the ultimate need for Sacramental Confession. The one point, which is often lost is that the person's will to confess must be genuine and must be acted upon (with regard to mortal sins) when the present threat passes.

Pastors can lead the faithful in, or the faithful by yourselves may make, an examination of conscience and be assured in faith that your own sorrow, under the present circumstances, is sufficient to assure you of God's mercy.

The Holy See has also recently reminded us that the Church teaching about Indulgences is still active and alive in the Church.

Thus, for those who may want the priest to come and anoint in "danger of death" the Holy See reminds us:

"The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the *Viaticum*, entrusting each and every one to Divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a *Plenary Indulgence* on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. *Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, no.12).

Since most people are very familiar with the Rosary the following, taken from the Enchiridion of Indulgences, should be noted:

A Plenary Indulgence is granted, if the Rosary is recited in a church or public oratory or in a **family group**, a religious community or pious association Now the Rosary is a certain formula of prayer, which is made up of fifteen decades of 'Hail Marys' with an 'Our Father' before each decade, and in which the recitation of each decade is accompanied by pious meditation on a particular mystery of our Redemption. The name 'Rosary,' however, is commonly used in reference to only a third (that is, five decades only) of the fifteen decades. The gaining of the plenary indulgence is regulated by the following norms:

1. The recitation of five decades of the Rosary suffices; but the five decades must be recited continuously.
2. The vocal recitation **MUST** be accompanied by pious meditation on the mysteries.
3. Sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions, when this becomes possible.

Special Instructions have been issued to those priests engaged in hospital ministry in regard to additional pastoral actions which may be used in accordance with directives from the Holy See for forgiveness of sins and the granting of Plenary Indulgences.