

Dear Parishioners,

Peace be with you! As our political and medical experts work around the clock to curb the spread of the COVID-19 and protect our most vulnerable population, we all must embrace the challenges and sacrifices associated with the role we must play for the common good. At this point we have passed the period of let's wait to see what happens. This is no longer an option as we are learning from the situation and conditions of other nations plagued by the respiratory virus, even more so, as the number of those infected and the death toll continues to climb in our country. So far, leaders of religious organization and churches have collaborated and coordinated with politicians and medical officials at both federal and state levels in their responses. Based on this ongoing collaboration and corporation, Archbishop Lucas has issued guidelines to help us modify some of our liturgical practices and behaviors. Since the bulletin insert this past weekend, things have changed, hence, Archbishop Lucas has suspended all public gatherings in all Catholic Schools and Churches, including weekday and weekend Masses at least for a period of two weeks. Churches and chapels will stay open for private prayers and devotions; and priests are allowed to celebrate private Masses or live stream Masses, if they so desired. Parishioners are advised to watch Masses as scheduled on the various Catholic media. In line with the Archbishop's instruction, therefore, **there will be no public gathering and Masses in our three Churches for at least two weeks, beginning March 17th-30th.**

I am particularly saddened by the suspension of all parish activities because I appreciate the vibrancy of our community and look forward to each celebration of the Eucharist with you; and enjoy our weekly family gatherings around the table of the Lord. But like you all I realize that this is what must be done to stay safe and healthy. The safety of our parish family and community is the priority for now. Nevertheless, I share in the anguish of the many Catholics around the globe who must sacrifice the opportunity to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus daily or weekly. I believe this is the greatest sacrifice you are being asked to make for the sake of our vulnerable population. But faith tells us that the Lord has not left us and we do not feel abandoned because even when we cannot receive Jesus physically, He comes to us in many other ways spiritually. This moment is a reminder that long before the construction of Churches, Cathedrals and Basilicas, the Church began in family homes and around the family table. I urge you parents in the coming days to be intentional in leading your children in prayers, worship, reading of scripture and other forms of spiritual activities as a way of honoring the Lord's presence in your midst. In the coming days, the parish will make available various opportunities and resources to stay connected as the Body of Christ. This is not the time to be discouraged or fall asleep, it is a time for spiritual awakening, requiring intense prayers and actions, especially reaching out to the shut-ins who may feel isolated. We can use our phones to keep in touch and we should be kind enough to check on the elderly; and when possible drop off a meal or a treat! Rather than disengage we must grow in our patience, perseverance, kindness, compassion and charity for our neighbors.

It is said, tough times do not last but tough people do! We are tough and resilient as a people of faith. Your prayers will make a difference, and this too will pass away. I know a lot of you have seen your portfolios depreciate within a short time. The economic implications of the virus and the resulting hardships to individuals and families are real as many will lose their source of livelihood or paychecks. Even for a short time, this can be a source of stress, panic and anxiety, however, we trust in the Lord's providence and hope in his love and goodness, knowing He gives riches and satisfies the hungry and the poor. It may take time, but I believe we will come out strong. However, if you need help, call the parish office and we shall figure it out with you.

Finally, thank you for your cooperation and understanding as we walk and talk with each other both in keeping each other healthy and staying engaged. Be assured of my love, care and prayers for your needs and the complete eradication of this deadly virus. God bless you.

Fr. Kizito Okhuoya, Pastor