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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 23, 2020

My Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious, and all Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During these days of uncertainty and even fear, I am eager to remind you that Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, promised that "...I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:20). Christ fulfills his promise in many ways and especially through the ministry of the Church. This ministry takes many forms, including the sacrament of reconciliation, the anointing of the sick, the pastoral care of persons who are dying and the final rites for the dying. In all our care, it is the mercy of God that we celebrate and that gives us hope.

Another expression of God's mercy is the granting of indulgences, which reduce the punishment that our sins deserve. These indulgences are efficacious because of the superabundance of grace merited by Christ's death on the cross and the graces accumulated by the virtues and prayers of the saints. At the same time, the one receiving the indulgences is not an idle spectator. The Christian who receives the indulgence must perform some action that springs from his or her spiritual life. Usually, this action consists of saying certain prayers, professing the Creed, participating in Eucharistic adoration, or visiting a parish Church on its titular feast. However, the indulgence is granted by the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep and not because we have earned it.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to promulgate the following summary of an instruction from the Holy See regarding the Sacrament of Reconciliation and indulgences. I have also appended links to the original texts of the two instructions from the Apostolic Penitentiary. You remain very much in my fervent prayers as I ask for yours. In the midst of these fretful times, we continue to take comfort in the Lord's promise to be with us always until the end of the age. May God bless you and keep you safe and healthy.

Your brother in Christ,

Most Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe

March 23, 2020

To all clergy, religious and to all the faithful,

The following is a statement from Archbishop Wester concerning special indulgences and the sacrament of reconciliation in this time of epidemic.

- 1) **Sacrament of Reconciliation:** Prudence should be adopted in individual celebration; e.g., in a ventilated place outside the confessional, suitable distance, use of protective masks, etc. Priests must take care that, whatever method is used, it must not endanger the sacramental seal and necessary discretion.
- 2) **General Absolution:** In case of sudden need to impart absolution to several faithful together due to: 1) imminent danger of death; 2) insufficient time to hear individual confessions; 3) grave necessity, priests are to:
 - a. Inform the Archbishop if possible. If imparted due to insufficient time or ability to inform the Archbishop beforehand, do so as soon as possible;
 - b. Accompany the general absolution with a reminder that they are obliged to seek individual sacramental confession as soon as possible if they are able and the sacrament is available.

I emphasize that general absolution should be imparted only in those cases where the current pandemic and/or the imminent danger of death make it necessary. This would include, but is not limited to, circumstances where the priest cannot enter a ward with dying COVID-19 patients or even with those who will hopefully recover but would be comforted by the absolution of their sins.

- 3) **If Sacramental Absolution—Individual nor General—Not Available:** The faithful are reminded that perfect contrition, coming from love of God as beloved above all else, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness and accompanied by a firm resolution to have individual sacramental confession as soon as possible, obtains forgiveness of even mortal sins.
- 4) **Special Indulgences:** From the authority of the Supreme Pontiff, the Apostolic Penitentiary grants a plenary indulgence, which removes all temporal punishment (Purgatory) due to sin:
 - a. **General requirements:**
 - i. Offer this trial on the occasion of this epidemic in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters; AND
 - ii. Have the will to fulfil the usual conditions for a plenary indulgence of sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions, as soon as possible.
 - b. **Specific Works:** A plenary indulgence is granted to 1) the faithful suffering from Coronavirus and are subject to quarantine by order of a health or civil authority, 2) as well as for health care workers, family members and all who expose themselves to the risk of contagion for the care of the sick, if, along with the general requirements of (a) above, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to:

- i. The celebration of Holy Mass, OR
- ii. The recitation of the Holy Rosary; OR
- iii. The pious practice of the Way of the Cross, or other forms of devotion; OR
- iv. At least recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Specific Works for the for ANY of the faithful: On the occasion of the current world epidemic, a plenary indulgence is granted under the same conditions as in (4) a.) above to the faithful who, imploring from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted, and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself:

- v. Offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or the reading of the Holy Scriptures, for a least a half an hour; OR
- vi. Recite the Holy Rosary, make a pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of 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.

References:

- 1) [Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the current pandemic, 20.03.2020](#)
- 2) [Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic, 20.03.2020](#)