

## **Status of Pandemic**

We are now seeing an increase in number of cases of COVID-19 within the boundaries of the Diocese of Gallup to include nearly all the counties in Arizona and New Mexico. The numbers continue to grow steadily in the more populated areas of both states. That may seem discouraging to see this trend continue even after the restrictions put in place this week. However, there is a substantial lag in effect because of the long incubation period of the disease (time from exposure to first symptoms). The results of today's efforts will not manifest completely for 10-14 days. We pray that the acceleration in the number of cases will begin to show some moderation soon.

## **Recommendations:**

We strongly support the advice of the civil authorities in both Arizona and New Mexico plus the Navajo Nation to remain at home except for urgent necessities. All the previous restrictions on Church activities to include suspension of public celebration of the Mass are still in effect. The faithful are encouraged to take advantage of this time for spiritual communion through reading of spiritual books and scriptures plus prayer, especially for those affected by the current disease and for relief from the spread of the infection. We also encourage everyone to take advantage of the many opportunities to watch or listen to the celebration of the Holy Mass to include the live stream of the 11:00 AM celebration of Mass at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Gallup.

## **Other News:**

On Thursday evening, March 19, 2020, during Eucharistic Adoration, His Excellency, James Seán Wall, Bishop of the Diocese of Gallup, consecrated the Diocese of Gallup under the protection of Saint Joseph, the husband of Maria and stepfather of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bishop processed Our Lord outside and blessed the diocese with the Eucharist. As we move forward, let us in prayer entrust one another to Our Merciful Lord, and rely upon the intercessory prayers of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the diocese, and Saint Joseph, patron of the Universal Church.

The Chancery Office is closed to the public until further notice, but functions will continue with vital staff reporting for duty as needed. Many of the employees will work from home to fulfill our mission to support the needs of the parishes and faithful of the Diocese. Telephone and electronic communications will be facilitated. If messages are left, the staff will attempt to answer promptly. Thank you in advance for your patience.

Bishop Wall has directed the priests of the Diocese to celebrate the Holy Mass daily in private with special prayers the physical safety and spiritual well-being of all the faithful. Other celebrations of the Mass are not allowed except for the celebration of Holy Matrimony and funerals with attendance restricted to 10 persons. The faithful are asked not to request for "private" celebrations of the Mass either in the church or at a home since that is not authorized.

Anointing of the sick is restricted to those in danger of death. We note that hospitals, nursing homes and other care facilities may place restrictions that prohibit the priest from visiting to administer the Sacrament.

Confessions may continue to be offered for the faithful but only where the priest can establish the setting to meet the requirements for social distancing and a space that is sufficiently large and well-ventilated or outside. Please consult the websites of the local parish or posted signs.

The churches and chapels of the Diocese remain open during regular hours for private prayer and devotion. Please be mindful of the requirement for social distancing (at least 6 feet of space between persons or families). We must also be aware to keep the number of people gathered to 10 or less. That may necessitate shorter visits than usual as a courtesy to others if the number present exceeds 10.

Lastly, we remind everyone to be very careful not to go out in public if you are sick. Reach out for help. Others can bring you things that you need so you can stay home. The symptoms of both fever and a cough together should prompt us to report to our physician or the hospital to be checked. However, it is not good for people to run to the medical facilities desiring to be tested for the COVID-19 virus if those two symptoms are not present. Such visits needlessly overload the medical services and could put a person at greater risk to contact someone who has this disease.

#### **Reflections and Prayer:**

This Scripture readings of this Fourth Sunday of Lent offer us much consolation and some challenge. The Lord is indeed our shepherd, and he is a good shepherd, for he laid down his life for us. He is our healer too, in body and soul. May we pray that he heals the blindness that prevents us from seeing the needs of others and gives us the vision to follow him into the charity that he would have us do in his name.

*Heavenly Father, we call upon You as our shepherd to lead us in safety, especially in these dark times of concern about the epidemic that threatens our land. Bless the success of our community efforts to manage this threat through self-sacrifice and tending to the welfare of others, in prayer and deeds. Bless us with your fatherly consolation and give us the strength to persevere, to love boldly in your name. +Amen*

**St. Joseph, Pray for us.**