April 2, 2020

Pastor, Parochial Vicars, LEMs, Deacons,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Covid-19 is straining us to the max and testing our faith and resiliency in every sphere of our lives. As our ministries are severely impacted let us reach out to our families who are hunkered down from day to day trying to stay safe and hopeful. Regarding faith matters, in the second half of the month of March all parishes, schools and social service ministries have responded by enlarging their digital communication skills and social media presence to shine the light of the Gospel. It has been a struggle, but we have not been powerless, evident in your proactive response and creativity. Thank you for your love for the Lord and his people. Clearly, we are striving to persevere in unprecedented circumstances, and I share with you the opening stanza at the outset of the Purgatorio in Dante’s Divine Comedy as a point of reference. “In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself within a dark wood where the straight path was lost. Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell what a wild, and rough and stubborn wood this was which in my thought renew the fear.” We are in this dark valley, yet during the days ahead we are most mindful that the Lord Jesus, crucified and risen, accompanies us in his goodness and mercy, anointing us in his Holy Spirit through faith, and filling our hearts and minds to the brim with his love. Let us return to the Divine Comedy because the final stanza of the Paradisio recalls the hope to which we are called in Jesus Christ risen from the dead. The poet had journeyed from shadows into the eternal dawn. “But by now my desire and will were turned, like a balanced wheel rotated evenly, by the love that moves the sun and the other stars.” May this love, Jesus Christ, the dawn from on high, restore our balance, shaken by the powerful unseen enemy.

As we look to Holy Week and beyond, once again it is necessary to highlight several constraints and suspensions in the time ahead.

- Our churches will be closed through April 30, a reality to be reviewed in the second half of this month.
- The traditional blessing of palms will take place this weekend, but because of the well-founded fear of contamination and further infections, palms will not be distributed in our parishes until we regather in our churches.
- Effective immediately, in response to the Governor’s executive order which established a state-wide shelter-in-place for Mississippi we are suspending the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation until further notice. God honors our hunger and thirst for his mercy and the eventual celebration of the Sacrament of Penance will bring it to fulfillment.
- The Chrism Mass will be celebrated on a date yet to be determined during the Easter season.
In spite of these severe constraints, may the Holy Spirit guide us through Holy Week with a deeper desire for prayer, forgiveness and reconciliation with God and one another. The Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil** comprise the Triduum which are the most inspiring and solemn liturgies of the year. We will renew our Covenant of Baptism at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday with Catholics in our diocese and throughout the world. The most profound reality of our lives is our relationship with the Most Blessed Trinity that transcends time and place and all constraints. We are God’s children now! May this be our consolation and peace.

In the eternal love of the crucified and risen One,

+Joseph R. Kopacz
Joseph R Kopacz
Bishop of Jackson

** The Easter Vigil is to begin at 8:00 pm in our time zone and must conclude by dawn.