Holy Week 2020

Dear Pastors, Associate Pastors, Parish Administrators, Deacons, and Lay Ecclesial Ministers:

In ordinary times we would be in the process of gathering from all corners of our diocese for the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Peter the Apostle, a manifestation of unity in the Diocese of Jackson, the Body of Christ, unlike any other celebration of faith. I pause to grieve this void more than any event that has been cancelled or suspended due by Covid-19 to this point in time. The ringing of the church bells at 6:00 pm later today would have occurred 15 minutes into the Chrism Mass. I ask you to say an extra prayer for all the of the priests who traditionally renew their vows today, as well as for all leadership in the Diocese of Jackson who are collaborators in the Lord’s vineyard.

I am surely encouraged by the prodigious display of creative energy that has poured forth in all of our ministries at the hands of our priests, deacons, religious, our parish ministers, our educators, and our chancery staff, all of whom are working to serve diocesan entities and ministries in the best way possible during these demanding times. On this day when all priests serving in the Diocese of Jackson would have renewed their priestly vows, I am inspired to share with them and all in the diocese the wisdom from Cardinal Mario Piacenza of the Vatican’s Major Penitentiary in his letter to the Missionaries of Mercy and to all priests. Recall that Pope Francis appointed priest as Missionaries of Mercy to broaden the opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- In the face of social distancing mercy does not stop, because God does not distance himself.
- No one ought to be deprived of the closeness and caress of Jesus.
- To all priests, although the Sacrament of Reconciliation is severely restricted for a time, don’t stop your works of mercy. Remember that at the essence of the priesthood is the ministry of Intercession on behalf of your people. Pray for them and yourself in silence, in adoration and especially through the Eucharist in their absence.
- Even in your people’s physical absence, mercy and salvation flow from the Eucharist, the source of all grace for the Church and for the world.
- Pray for the coronavirus sufferers, health care workers, the lonely and the homeless.
- Mercy does not cease when hands are extended in loving charity and generosity.
- Our intercessory prayer is not limited to this life only but extends to the dead in the light and power of the Lord’s Paschal Mystery.

All of us go deeper into Holy Week mindful that we are preparing for the renewal of our covenant in Baptism at Easter as the Lord’s priestly people, his body in this world. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his own wonderful light. Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people. You had not received mercy, but now you have. Received mercy.” (1Peter 2,9) Let us be faithful in our prayer for one another, ordained and laity, in our desire to deepen our love for the Lord who has laid down his life for us so that we might love one another as he has loved us.

In God’s peace,

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