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March 13, 2020

Message of Bishop Solis Regarding Emergency Measures Taken

Greetings of God's peace and love! You must have by now learned about the decision I prayerfully made for the Diocese of Salt Lake City regarding the outbreak of the coronavirus. The World Health Organization has called it a pandemic. Governor Gary Herbert and the local government in Utah has made us aware of this growing crisis in our state. In view of this, I have implemented emergency measures in response to help address this serious situation.

Those measures include temporarily suspending public celebration of worship including Holy Masses, issuing a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday, and having our Catholic schools teach through remote instruction rather than onsite. These measures will remain in effect until March 31, or until further notice.

This was a very difficult decision. It is with a heavy heart that I have canceled Mass, celebration of other sacraments, postponed funerals and also religious events such as the diocesan Lenten retreat that involve the presence of many people. My decision, in consultation with other diocesan leaders, is to heed the warning of the authorities in an effort to help prevent the further spread of the disease in order to safeguard the health of those who are more vulnerable, and for the greater good of the community. Today, it is not just a matter of containing the disease, but we must also consider the greater possibility of endangering the lives of many in our community. It is perhaps a superabundance of caution, but by virtue of the serious circumstances, I find it prudent to act now.

I ask for your understanding and for you to broaden your perspective of the whole issue. It is more than me individually, but us, as a community. We Catholics are a minority here in Utah, yet a big part of it. Our local government has asked the various sectors of our community for our cooperation and help to address this crisis, and we are doing our part.

In our little and humble way, we can contribute to helping in this time of crisis by temporarily depriving ourselves of the Holy Mass, the summit of our Christian life and worship as Catholics, in a spirit of sacrifice and charity, for the sake of others and the greater good of our community, especially those who are vulnerable to the disease.

In these trying times, please continue to pray and practice our faith. We worship as a community, and the gift of the grace of faith given by the Holy Spirit grows in the community as well as in us individually. While we cannot gather together in a worship space, we can still partake of a spiritual communion by watching the celebration of the Holy Mass on television or on social media, through our diocesan website or YouTube. Our churches remain open for your personal visits and prayers before the Blessed Sacrament as well.

You can also pray individually or as a family at home. In a special way, let us seek the grace and mercy of God by making use of the Holy Bible, and spiritual and inspirational books, as well as pious devotions such as the Rosary, Stations of the Cross and Novenas. Pray for one another, especially those who are affected by the coronavirus, as well as their caretakers and health care workers.

Let us ask for God's grace of strength and courage so we can withstand our trials and sufferings, following the example of our forbearers in faith and by invoking our Blessed Mother to intercede for us. May our trust in God's power and through the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, help us to end this pandemic and grant us His salvation.

In this time of need, I invite all the faithful to seek together the maternal intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and I share with you this prayer from Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe,
Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.
We fly to you today as your beloved children.
We ask you to intercede for us with your Son,
as you did at the wedding in Cana.
Pray for us, loving Mother,
and gain for our nation and world,
and for all our families and loved ones,
the protection of your holy angels,
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.
For those already afflicted,
we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance.
Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful,
wipe away their tears and help them to trust.
In this time of trial and testing,
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.
We come to you with confidence,
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,
health of the sick and cause of our joy.
Shelter us under the mantle of your protection,
keep us in the embrace of your arms, help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+the Most Rev. Oscar A. Solis
Bishop of Salt Lake City