PATRIARCHATUS LATINUS - JERUSALEM

بطريركية القدس للاتين

Prot. N. (1) 1902020

March 5, 2020

To all the Faithful, Priests and Religious of the pastoral region of Bethlehem

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May the Lord give you peace!

The Palestinian Ministry of Health has issued a decree declaring the closure of schools, mosques and churches for 14 days, in order to reduce, as much as possible, the spread of the Corona Virus. Unfortunately, this danger is already in our midst, and with a sense of responsibility, we must cooperate with the authorities and those responsible for public health for the good of all.

In compliance with the Ministry's decree, I would like to give you some practical guidelines for our present situation, some of which have already been previously communicated. These guidelines apply to all parishes, all churches, chapels, religious houses and any other place of worship in the territory of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour and Jericho. All other locations are exempt from this provision. I hope it will not be necessary to extend it to other locations in the future.

1. That churches remain open only for individual prayer. Public celebrations within the church must be reduced by applying the rules set out in No. 3.
2. This provision also applies to Sundays. In this case, the faithful are exempt from the obligation of Sunday Mass participation.
3. Masses can be celebrated, but only for groups of no larger than 15, provided, that there is sufficient distance between people in the church (at least one meter). Otherwise, celebrations cannot be held.
4. Communion is given only on the hand.
5. Avoid giving the sign of peace with the hands or any other form of body contact.
6. Empty the holy water fonts in churches and chapels. Instead, I recommend that it be distributed to houses for prayer.
7. Funerals must be held in cemeteries, with as few people as possible, but not in enclosed spaces.

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8. The Via Crucis (Stations of the Cross) can be held in the squares or open spaces, if the weather is appropriate, otherwise it will be prayed within one's own family.
9. All ecclesial and pastoral activities, including youth groups, scouts and others are canceled.
10. If conditions permit, I invite all parish priests to organize online streaming of Masses through the use of the media and to communicate this possibility to their parishioners. The same applies to catechism and other similar initiatives
11. I leave it to individual parish priests to find ways and forms to allow the faithful to receive the Eucharist, the Bread that gives us strength for the journey, as in holding outdoor Masses or by other means, but always in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry and with a sense of responsibility.
12. We encourage everyone to pray at home, read the Bible, and continue to fast, asking God for mercy and forgiveness.

I invite all communities to pray for our brothers and sisters who are further isolated at this time. Prayer gives us strength.

I know that not everyone will agree to these guidelines, but I call on everyone to a sense of responsibility and unity. The strength which comes to us from communion with Christ Jesus, does not take away our human responsibility to protect, care for and heal our environment.

I wish everyone a blessed Lent!

In Christ,

+ Pierbattista Pizzaballa
Apostolic Administrator