

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Following President Ramaphosa's address on Sunday evening, which included the prohibition of gatherings of more than 100 people, Bishop Zungu has given the following dispensations for the Diocese of Port Elizabeth:

- 1. A dispensation from the normal obligations to attend Sunday Mass and other Celebrations of the Easter Season will be granted to all those who may have pre-existing health conditions, the elderly, young children and parents of young children.**
- 2. All faithful are granted dispensation to attend a weekday Mass in order to fulfil their Sunday obligation.**

As good citizens, we intend to follow both the letter (numbers) and the spirit (social distancing) of the directives from the president and our bishop. Therefore, we encourage the faithful to take note of the dispensations granted by the bishop and to make use of them. Our weekday Masses take place at 08:30 and 17:30, Monday to Friday.

Weekend Masses

FOR THE WEEKEND OF 21/22 MARCH, the Fathers of the Oratory will celebrate Masses in the church at the usual times. The church will be open, and the faithful will be allowed to attend. However, the congregation size will be limited to 100. Based on our current Mass attendance, and feedback we have received from parishioners, this will be possible to achieve. You will notice some logistical changes for the weekend Masses (e.g. the collection, hymn books, etc) implemented in order to curb potential transmission of the Coronavirus. Congregants are asked to space themselves out in the pews.

We will review the weekend Mass situation every week, based on attendance, as well as any new directives from the government and the Diocese, and the Eastern Cape's situation.

The preacher for the weekend will make his homily available for distribution to the faithful via the parish office (email and hardcopy) for those who do not attend. All Mass intentions will be honoured.

Spiritual Communion and televised/streamed Masses

If you do not attend a Sunday Mass, we encourage you to watch, reverently, a live televised or internet-streamed Mass at some point on Sunday, and spend some time in prayer and with the readings for the Sunday. Prepare for this as you normally would: fast, dress appropriately as you would for Mass, prepare the Mass readings, pray quietly beforehand and afterward in thanksgiving, etc.

Make a *Spiritual Communion*. To do this, one makes an Act of Faith, expressing your faith in the Lord's Real Presence in the Eucharist; an Act of Love expressing your love and gratitude to the Lord for His infinite Love; then express your desire to receive Him and invite Our Lord to come into your humble and contrite heart with the following prayer: ***My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.***

We do not, at present have the facilities to stream Masses from the church, but are looking at options. Follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/peoratory) and YouTube (St Bernadette's Catholic Church) where we will endeavor to stream what we can. See below for other good options for watching Mass online.

Holy Week

While it is too early to make decisions about the Holy Week ceremonies, other than to note Bishop Zungu's dispensations, the Triduum does not carry an obligation to attend.

Other gatherings:

Catechism classes / EDGE / Life Teen are suspended according to the school closures. The Musical Oratory of Stations of the Cross scheduled for 3 April will be cancelled. All non-essential meetings will be cancelled. Home groups can make their own decisions based on their individual situations.

Contributions in support of the Church:

The reduction of attendance at Masses will mean a significant reduction in the collection taken. So many people are affected financially during this time: small businesses, the travel and entertainment industry, etc. So, too, will the church be affected, and, at the same time, be called to respond to many needs in the community in the months to come. We encourage you to continue to support the material needs of the church via your planned giving, EFTs/Snapscan contributions, and your weekly contributions.

Parish Office:

The parish office will be open for this week. We will communicate any changes to this should they happen.

Please know that the Fathers of the Oratory are available to you. This is a confusing time for us all and we are in uncharted territory. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Your servants in Christ

Fr Jonathan Vermaak
Parish Priest

Fr Gregory Mitchell
Provost

Places where you can watch Mass online:

www.vaticannews.va (The Holy Father celebrating daily Mass)

www.ewtn.com (Daily Mass available on demand; usually televise the pope's Mass as well)

www.mass-online.org (various Masses streamed live throughout the day)

Other daily prayer resources:

<https://us.magnificat.net> (daily readings; free online use during Coronavirus pandemic)

<https://universalis.com> (also in App format – and also helps you learn to pray the Liturgy of the Hours)