



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

5825 SHELBY OAKS DRIVE
MEMPHIS, TN 38134 901-373-1200

16 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With compassionate regard for the health and welfare of the people of West Tennessee, and following the directives of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, I have made the reluctant decision to cancel the public celebration of the Holy Eucharist throughout the Catholic Diocese of Memphis until further notice.

In my almost one year as your bishop, I have witnessed the depth of faith of the people of this diocese. I have enjoyed celebrating Mass with you and I have appreciated your profound devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It pains me that the recent outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has taken such a toll on communities throughout the world that this step is necessary. Our brothers and sisters in Western Europe are now experiencing high rates of infection and a growing number of fatalities. We face the same prospects here in the United States unless drastic measures are taken to reduce the possibilities of infection.

As the celebration of the Eucharist is the source and summit of our Christian faith-life, how is it possible to live without the gift of Holy Communion, Sunday by Sunday? It will be difficult. It will be a kind of poverty. It has the feel of a penance. But, know that this decision was made as a disciple, as your Bishop. The Golden Rule (Matthew 7.12), of caring for our neighbor as we care for ourselves...this is the purpose of this drastic action...of caring for the health of our communities and our cities and towns. And, as St. Paul reminded his community: the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5.5).

I want to assure you that the priests of this diocese and I will each be privately celebrating Mass for your intentions. I am also making arrangements for the celebration of Sunday Mass to be livestreamed on our Catholic Diocese of Memphis *FaceBook* page. Pray with us there or in one of the many other broadcast or livestreamed Masses available. From your homes, please unite in a prayer for spiritual communion. Please continue your spiritual reading, your Lenten sacrifices, and especially your prayers for an end to the pandemic and the health of the people of the world.

May this time away from the celebration of the Eucharist increase our hunger for the living God. Know that the Lord is with us in this time of fasting and prayer. When we return to the Lord's Table, how much more joyous will our celebration be, how glorious to once again share the Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation. I am yours

In the light and love of the Lord,

Most Reverend David R. Talley, M.S.W., J.C.D.
Bishop of Memphis

I will give you a new heart *Ezekiel 36:26*