

## NEWS

# Polish bishops call for more Masses in response to coronavirus: 'Unimaginable' to close churches

*'Just as hospitals treat diseases of the body, so the Church serves to, among other things, treat illness of the soul; that is why it is unimaginable that we not pray in our churches,' said Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, leader of the Polish bishops' conference.*

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*Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, president of the Polish bishops' conference.*

*By Dorothy Cummings McLean*

POZNAN, Poland, March 10, 2020 (LifeSiteNews) – Poland's bishops have called for more Masses as a response to the coronavirus epidemic.

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Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, writing as the leader of the Polish bishops' conference, has released a statement asking that the extra Masses be made available so that the congregations will be smaller.

“Acknowledging the recommendation of the Chief Sanitary Inspector that there not be large gatherings of people, I’m asking for the increase – insofar as this is possible – in the number of Sunday Masses in the churches, so that at any one time the number of faithful participating in the liturgies are according to the sanitary regulation,” Gądecki wrote.

The Polish archbishop of Poznań declared that it was “unimaginable” for Polish Catholics not to pray in their churches.

“In the current situation, I wish to remind you that just as hospitals treat diseases of the body, so the Church serves to, among other things, treat illness of the soul; that is why it is unimaginable that we not pray in our churches,” he wrote.

“I remind you that, in the current situation, old people and the sick can stay at home and from there watch broadcasts of Holy Mass,” he continued, offering a list of Masses broadcast on various Polish television stations.

“I remind you that there is no rule that during Mass you have to give the sign of peace by shaking hands,” Gądecki added.

“Let us commend to God those who have died because of coronavirus. Let us pray for health for the sick as well as for doctors, medical personnel and all the services who are working to stop the spread of this virus,” he continued.

“We pray for the end of the epidemic. In accordance with the Tradition of the Church, I encourage you especially to pray the [Trisagion] prayer of supplication ‘Holy God, Holy Mighty...’.”

The response of Polish Catholic newspaper *Polonia Christiana* to the news of Gądecki's request was “Thank God!”

Currently there are only 22 cases of coronavirus in Poland, a contrast to Italy, where over 9,000 people have the virus, and hundreds have died. In Italy, among other measures, people are being asked to stay one to two meters (i.e roughly three to six-and-a-half feet) away from each other.

## **Pope St. Gregory the Great's response to the plague: a penitential procession**

Italian historian Roberto de Mattei has described how Pope St. Gregory the Great responded to a deadly plague during his pontificate. After his election in the year 590, Gregory led a penitential procession of the faithful throughout Rome.

“While the multitude traversed the city, in sepulchral silence, the pestilence reached such a point of fury, that in the brief space of an hour, eighty people fell dead to the ground. However, Gregory didn't cease for a second in exhorting the people to continue praying and

insisted that the picture of the Virgin painted by St. Luke and kept in Santa Maria Maggiore, be brought to the front of the procession,” de Mattei recounted.

The plague of the 6th century was seen as a punishment. After the procession, Gregory saw how angels settled themselves in a circle around Our Lady’s picture, and, raising his eyes, he “saw at the top of the castle an angel, who, after drying his sword dripping with blood, put it back in its sheath, as a sign that the punishment was over.”

## **All public Masses in Italy suspended until April 3**

The bishops of Italy have announced that they are suspending all public Masses until April 3 in accordance with a decree issued by the Italian government on March 8, which called for the suspension of “civil and religious ceremonies, including funeral ceremonies.”

On Sunday, Pope Francis did not pray the traditional Angelus prayer at one of the windows of the Apostolic Palace overlooking St. Peter’s Square, his usual practice, but instead prayed it from inside the library. The short ceremony was live-streamed and could be seen on screens in St. Peter’s Square. The Vatican had announced on Saturday that these measures were “necessary in order to avoid the risk of diffusion of COVID-19 due to the crowds during the security checks in order to access the square, as was also requested by the Italian authorities.”

At the beginning of the Angelus, Pope Francis referred to himself as being “caged” in the library of the Apostolic Palace, adding, “but I see you, I am close to you.” Hundreds of faithful had gathered in St. Peter’s Square, even though the Angelus was only broadcast to a large screen in the square, without the Holy Father’s physical presence.

The Pope mentioned that “this way of praying the Angelus” was done as a preventative measure, “in order to avoid small crowds of people, which can favor the transmission of the virus.”

## **Communion on the tongue ‘more hygienic’ than by hand, some bishops try to ban it anyway**

Numerous bishops in France, the U.S., England and Wales, Malta, Jerusalem, Singapore, and the Philippines have issued guidelines in favor of giving Communion in the hand but not on the tongue, with some outright banning the latter. This comes despite a July 24, 2009 statement from the Vatican – issued during the swine flu epidemic – affirming that Catholics have the right to receive Communion on the tongue, and the fact that Communion in the hand is a dispensation and was never intended to be the norm around the world.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon, led by Archbishop Alexander Sample, issued guidelines affirming the right of Catholics to receive the Eucharist on the tongue after some of his priests tried to ban it.

Bishop Athanasius Schneider, one of the world’s most outspoken defenders of Catholic orthodoxy and doctrine, also has defended the reception of Communion on the tongue despite coronavirus fears.

He also argued that “Communion in the mouth is certainly less dangerous and more hygienic compared to Communion in the hand.”

“From a hygienic point of view, the hand carries a huge amount of bacteria. Many pathogens are transmitted through the hands. Whether by shaking other people’s hands or frequently touching objects, such as door handles or handrails and grab bars in public transport, germs can quickly pass from hand to hand; and with these unhygienic hands and fingers people then touch often their nose and mouth. Also, germs can sometimes survive on the surface of the touched objects for days. According to a 2006 study, published in the journal ‘BMC Infectious Diseases’, influenza viruses and similar viruses can persist on inanimate surfaces, such as e.g. door handles or handrails and handles in transport and public buildings for a few days,” he said.

He described any ban on Communion in the mouth as “unfounded compared to the great health risks of Communion in the hand in the time of a pandemic.”

Schneider said it’s as if some Church authorities are using the coronavirus as a “pretext” to trivialize reception of Communion.

Others have pointed out the irony in bishops rushing to restrict the reception of Holy Communion due to the possibility of physical sickness while having done nothing to restrict pro-abortion politicians and those living in adultery and other mortal sins from receiving Communion.

*Claire Chretien contributed to this report.*

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