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COVID-19 AND THE PASTORAL APPROACH

Dear Beloved Priests, Seminarians, Religious, Brethren and Children in Jesus Christ,
Praise be to Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God!

Further to my e-mails dated 07/03/2020 and 13/03/2020 and having received professional advice and instructions and also as part of united response on the part of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, I instruct that the following special pastoral measures be implemented in our Eparchy.

1. No Public Gathering: In order to keep each other safe, save lives and support NHS we do not gather for public acts of worship with effect from Friday evening, 20th of March 2020, until further notice. (For details please refer the attachments).

2. Liturgy of the Hours (Prayer of 7 times): I exhort all the faithful of the Eparchy to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in the context of not-having the public celebration of the Holy Qurbana. The mobile application of the Liturgy of the Hours in the Syro-Malabar Rite can be downloaded in the following link, <https://smliturgy.app.link> and the English version of the same is enclosed as an attachment. I also recommend to use the means of communication like skype to have community prayer and mutual spiritual support.

The "Divine Praises", with its tradition of seven times of prayer each day in accordance with the East Syrian Tradition, extends the 'divine-human' experience of the Holy Qurbana celebration to other moments of the day and the whole of our life. The Liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, head and body. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, celebrates it unceasingly in the Heavenly Liturgy, with the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles, all the saints and the multitude of those who have already entered the Kingdom (CCC

1187). The faithful who celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours are united to Christ, our High Priest, by the prayer of the psalms, meditation on the Word of God, and canticles and blessings, in order to be joined with His unceasing and universal prayer that gives glory to the Father and implores the gift of the Holy Spirit on the whole world (CCC 1176). The mystery of Christ, His Incarnation and Passover which we celebrate in the Eucharist especially at the Sunday Assembly permeates and transfigures the time of each day, through the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. This celebration, faithful to the Apostolic Exhortations to “pray constantly”, is “so devised that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God”. In this “public prayer of the Church”, the faithful exercise the royal priesthood of the baptized. Celebrated in “the form approved” by the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours “is truly the voice of the bride herself (Church) addressed to her bridegroom (Christ). It is the very prayer which Christ Himself together with His body addresses to the Father” (CCC 1174).

Our Church begins her “Liturgical Day” with the *Ramsha* the evening liturgy at 6.00 pm. The celebration of the Liturgical Day is brought to perfection with the singing of the “Divine Praises” during the following hours of *Lelya* (09.00 pm), *Qala d-Shahra* (03.00 am), *Sapra* (06.00 am), *Quta’a* (09.00 am), *’Endana* (12 noon) and *D-Bathsha’Sha’in* (03.00 pm).

2. *Lectio Divina*: I also instruct you to do the *lectio divina*, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer, is thus rooted in the Liturgical Celebration (CCC 1177). *Lectio Divina*, literally meaning “divine reading,” is an ancient practice of praying the Scriptures. During *Lectio Divina*, the faithful listens to the text of the Bible with the “ear of the heart,” as if he or she is in conversation with God, and God is suggesting the topics for discussion. The method of *Lectio Divina* includes moments of reading (*lectio*), reflecting on (*meditatio*), responding to (*oratio*) and resting in (*contemplatio*) the Word of God with the aim of nourishing and deepening one's relationship with the Divine.

3. Other Pious Practices: Let us continue more fervently our regular pious practices like Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, Way of the Cross, Novenas, Spiritual Reading and other prayers at home.

4. Prayer Day - Sunday, 22nd of March: I propose Sunday, 22nd of March 2020 as a day of prayer at home. Let us very specially bring the affected, the health workers and health and safety of our people to the Lord.

5. Holy Week: The Holy Week schedule will be informed in due time, corresponding to the circumstances and to the directions from the Health Department and the Bishops' Conference.

As the global population is at the siege of Covid-19, before which the humanity and all it's discoveries have become helpless and trusting in the Divine Providence, I urge you to pray incessantly that God's Will alone be done in this world. As we hear in the Sacred Scriptures "do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" (Is. 41:10).

I also take this opportunity to appreciate, in a special way, all those who are engaged in the services to the affected people. We are called to support one another in every way we can and especially those who are in need of our assistance. **I recommend the faithful to contact the parish priest/mission director/mission co-ordinator of your parish/mission/proposed mission for any support.**

Yours in our Lord and our God,

+ Joseph Srampickal

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Enclosures:

1. A letter from the President and Vice- President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
2. Liturgical Advice from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
3. English Version of the Liturgy of the Hours

NB: Please make sure that this circular is reached at the earliest to all the faithful in the Parishes/Missions/Proposed Missions of our Eparchy.