



CONFERENCE EPISCOPALE DU RWANDA

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COMMUNIQUE OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF RWANDA TO CATHOLIC FAITHFUL DURING THESE DIFFICULT MOMENTS DUE TO CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ who died and rose to save us, in these times of calamity due to the Covid-19 pandemic which continues to ravage the world, it is absolutely necessary that we strengthen ourselves in Christ, He who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Dear Priests, our cooperators in the triple pastoral charge of teaching, sanctifying and governing the people of God, our mission continues. We cannot currently meet face to face with the members of our faith communities for whom we have pastoral care, but spiritually we can do it very well. We are very grateful for your efforts to celebrate each day the Eucharistic Sacrifice in favor of the people of God and to help them by all means including new technologies to grow in spiritual communion with the Lord. Stay close to the flock entrusted to you anyway. The Spirit of God will show you the way to go so that the good prevails over the evil, the Hope over the despair and that the love of Christ spreads more in the world.

Dear Religious sharing with us the same vocation of showing men that Jesus is still alive in the state of life that we have chosen by deciding to abandon everything and consecrate ourselves to Him alone, keep on, you too, praying for suffering humanity because of the Covid-19.

Dear Faithful of Christ, daughters and sons of the living God, persevere in incessant prayer in your families and by the means of communication so as to overcome fear. May this time of trials help us all to renew ourselves in our relationship with God and to strengthen ever more our bonds of unity between us. Be calm, God is close to us and wants to save us. Let's go ! We, too, hold on to Him in order to rejoice and to be true heroes in the faith at the end of this fight.

Dear people of good will, leaders, medical staff and you who ensure the implementation of laws and *ad hoc* instructions, we appreciate all the good that you do to save the inhabitants of our dear homeland from this pandemic. We implore God to bless you and give you the strength you need. Be sure and certain that we support you in the demanding work that you are accomplishing in the service of God and humanity.

In this special period, we wish you drew particular attention to the following:

1. We would like to inform all Christians that His Excellency Mgr Antoine KAMBANDA, Archbishop of Kigali, will preside at the Eucharistic celebration at Radio Maria Rwanda on Wednesday, March 25, 2020, at 11 a.m. After Mass, we will unite with the Holy Father, Pope

Francis, in a prayer that he will say in communion with the rest of the world at 1 p.m. The Pope wants us to recite the prayer of “Our Father” at the same time and asks us to repeat it again and again. He will conclude this prayer with a blessing for the whole world. We urge all Christians to take part spiritually in this Mass on Radio Maria Rwanda and in this prayer with the Pope.

2. Friday March 27 at 7 p.m. in Rwanda, we again invite all Christians to join the Holy Father in his prayer in front of Saint Peter's Basilica. It will include listening to the word of God, supplications, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and will end with the exceptional blessing *Urbi et Orbi* ("to the city and to the world") to which will be added the possibility of receiving the plenary indulgence.

In this prayer, he will also have a special thought for the doctors, the nurses, the police force, all the leaders who help us to fight against the coronavirus. The Pope also urges us to respect the directives given by our leaders in order to overcome this pandemic. We would like that in preparation for this prayer with the Pope, we confide in the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Kibeho, by reciting the rosary of the seven pains on this day which requires sacrifice and repentance. There is also a prayer that we will recite asking God to deliver us from the Coronavirus. We recited it for the first time on Radio Maria Rwanda on March 14, 2020. This prayer is attached to this communiqué.

3. In these very challenging times due to the coronavirus pandemic, since it is obviously difficult to celebrate the liturgy of the faithful in churches, the **Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments** gave the bishops the guideline to follow during these Easter days. As you already know, Easter is the center of the liturgical year, it is not a feast like so many others, it is celebrated in three days (*Triduum Pascal*) preceded by Lent and ends with Pentecost. This is the reason why the three days of Easter constituting the foundation of our Faith cannot be transferred.

4. Here is how we will behave in these Easter days:

- 4.1. **The Chrism Mass:** Taking into account the situation prevailing in a given country, the Diocesan Bishop will postpone this Mass to a later date. It would be good to place it at the beginning of July before the presbyteral ordinations begin.

- 4.2. **About the Easter Triduum :** Since the Rwandan government and ecclesiastical authorities have prohibited gatherings, the following guidelines will apply:

- 4.2.1. First of all, we bring to your attention that the Bishops and parish priests will celebrate the mystery of the Paschal Triduum in the cathedral and parish churches, without the presence of the faithful. However, the priests will inform Christians of the schedule of celebrations so that they can join them spiritually in family prayer. Communication media such as Rwanda Television, Radio Maria Rwanda and other radio and television stations will help us reach the

faithful at home. «Conférence Episcopale du Rwanda» and the dioceses will use the communication technologies at their disposal to help the faithful in prayer, whether in community or personal.

4.2.2. Holy Thursday: In cathedral churches and parish churches, priests can concelebrate the Lord's Supper in the absence of the faithful. The footwashing rite will not take place. After the mass, there is no procession, the Blessed Sacrament will remain in the tabernacle. Priests who cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper will pray Vespers (see. *Liturgia Horarum*).

4.2.3. Good Friday: In the cathedral and parish churches, the Bishop or the Curate will celebrate the passion of the Lord and there will be no Christians in the Church. In the universal prayer, the Bishop will pray specifically for the sick, the dead and the distressed (see *Missale Romanum*- page 314 n.13).

4.2.4. The Easter Vigil is the Sunday of the solemnity of Easter: It will only be celebrated in the cathedral churches and in the parish churches. As for the celebration of the **Easter Vigil**, we will not light the fire at first, only the Paschal candle will be lit. There will be no procession and we will proceed directly to the song announcing the **paschal light**, the *Exsultet*, followed by "the liturgy of the Word". As for the "**Baptismal Liturgy**", only the baptismal promises will be renewed (see. *Missale Romanum*, page 371, n.55). Then we will celebrate the "**Eucharistic Liturgy**". Priests who will not be able to join the others for the celebration of the Easter Vigil, will pray the Office as prescribed for Easter Sunday (see. *Liturgia Horarum*). For nuns who have no possibility of going out, the Bishop of the diocese will decide what to do.

With regard to activities of Christian piety and processions which further enrich the expression of their faith during Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum, the diocesan Bishop may choose to transfer them to another period, for example to the dates of 14 and September 15.

Done at Kigali, on March 24th, 2020

✠Philippe RUKAMBA,
Bishop of Butare Diocese
President of «Conférence Episcopale du Rwanda».

ANNEX :

Prayer requesting for Coronavirus Protection and Healing

O Almighty God, Merciful Father,
You who show your love to all creation,
Have mercy in order to listen to the supplications that we present to you
In favor of all those who have been affected
By the coronavirus pandemic in various corners of the world.

We knee down in front of you and implore you
To help us stop the rapid spread of this pandemic,
To heal all those who have been infested with it,
To welcome those who died from it into your Kingdom,
And to comfort their families.

We beseech you yet
So that the cure for this disease can be quickly found,
That heads of state and public health professionals
May make wise decisions that save people's lives.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.