



**Bishop's Guidelines
to be observed
in the Diocese of Gibraltar
to prevent the
danger of spreading
the coronavirus**

The Government and the G.H.A. are closely monitoring the spread of the coronavirus in other countries and are therefore strongly recommending appropriate hygiene measures throughout Gibraltar, to minimize the risk of contagion from the coronavirus.

Gibraltar is a small place, with limited quarantine resources. The coronavirus has the potential for truly devastating consequences for many.

At present, the risk locally remains low and there is no emergency as such. Nevertheless, the coronavirus is spreading with alarming speed in other countries. Therefore, each of us must do all that we reasonably can now to ensure that this virus does not have any chance to spread if inadvertently caught.

Thankfully, there are no reported cases in Gibraltar at the moment. The coronavirus has an incubation period, which means it can be present undetected for a time, allowing in the meantime, many more persons to become infected. Given the usual high numbers of tourists and those travelling, it is sensible for us to follow the advice of the authorities and adopt a hygiene protocol for use at all our liturgies in the Diocese of Gibraltar, until such time as the experts inform us that the danger has passed.

Those with cold or flu symptoms should refrain from receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, to prevent the potential spread of the coronavirus.

All the faithful are asked to sanitise their hands before going to Mass.

I am therefore instructing all our Priests and *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* (EMHC) that they are to wash their hands as normal before Mass. Furthermore, they are required to sanitise them again, with a suitable antiviral hand gel, at the Offertory

or prior to administering the Blessed Sacrament. This should be repeated after Holy Communion has been distributed.

I am suspending the practice of offering the 'Sign of Peace' at Mass.

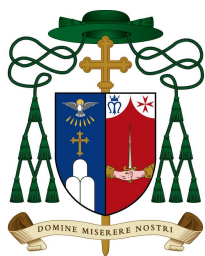
I am also withdrawing for the time being, the permission, where it exists, to receive the Precious Blood during the celebration of the Mass.

Finally, I fully appreciate the sacred, inviolable, right every Catholic has, as enshrined in liturgical law, to choose the manner in which to receive our Blessed Lord. However, having considered the advice to me from the Government, regarding the fatal impact the coronavirus could have in Gibraltar, I judge the pastoral situation to be such that it warrants extreme measures. I can understand that some may object, but at the same time, I cannot require in conscience that a Priest or EMHC run the risk to themselves or to others, of being infected by the coronavirus.

I am therefore recommending, in the strongest terms possible, that during public celebrations of the Mass, the right to receive the Blessed Sacrament on the tongue will not be exercised. This will not apply *in extremis* situations or when administering to the elderly who cannot receive on the hand (in which case, the Priests and/ or the EMHC are to take special care that they sanitise their hands immediately afterwards and avoid physical contact with others as far as possible until they have done so). I ask that extra vigilance be given over the due respect owed to the Blessed Sacrament. It is advisable to include a catechetical reminder to parishioners on the reverent manner in which Holy Communion should be received on the hand.

These guidelines will come into force immediately throughout the Diocese until further notice, including those places wherein public liturgies are held, with my authorization, for the Catholic laity of this Diocese.

Preventing the spread of the coronavirus is a very serious task and responsibility. I thank our Priests and helpers for their support and cooperation. I thank all the faithful who, despite the sadness and distress these measures might cause, will appreciate the urgency, demanding proactive action from us all.



+Carmel Zammit
Bishop of Gibraltar
12th February 2020

Note: the Holy Water fonts at the entrances of churches will not be filled, as an extra precautionary measure, until further notice.