



APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

The Catholic Church in UAE, Oman & Yemen

To all priests and religious working in the Vicariate of Southern Arabia

The season of Lent is soon arriving. As always, I wish to encourage you to use this time to accompany the faithful and develop their spiritual lives in a solid manner, in all the ways possible in the current situation, collaborating within the parish and amongst different parishes. This is also an opportunity for us, as I said in my letter to you all last year, to show our own solidarity with the people and our pastoral love for those facing physical and economic consequences by more moderate ways of life, additional prayer and sacrifice. Let us not forget our own spiritual lives this Lent.

Here I propose some practical guidelines for some aspects of the Lenten Season beginning with Ash Wednesday and for Holy Week. Of course, the civil situation in our countries is changing daily and we do not know what will be the situation by the end of March. The Holy See may also issue some more instructions as the Holy Week approaches. Surely therefore, this guidance may have to be updated and adapted. However, it is given now to help parishes with the advance planning of Holy Week.

I. ASH WEDNESDAY

1. Distribution of ashes:
 - a. The people should be notified about the different methods of giving ashes and told to kneel or bow their heads.
 - b. After the blessing of ashes, the priest will say the formula (e.g. “Remember you are dust”) once to all present.
 - c. the ministers distributing the ashes should simply sprinkle the ashes on the top of the head using the hand or instrument, without touching the head. Touching the forehead, even with an instrument, is not recommended.
2. Different parishes have different restrictions, especially on time. Therefore, I draw your attention to some other possibilities, according to individual situations.
 - a. Liturgy of the Word instead of the Mass: entrance antiphon of Ash Wednesday, Opening Prayer (Collect), some or all of the readings at Mass, the giving of ashes, Prayer of the Faithful, and final blessing with Prayer over the People.
 - b. Blessed ashes may also be distributed to people who wish (e.g. in small packets). All precautions should be followed in preparation and distribution.
 - c. If the parish priests feel there is a need, they can also give ashes to those who wish after the weekend Masses of the First Sunday of Lent, which also marks “the beginning of this venerable and sacred time” (cf. *Circular Letter of the Congregation of Divine Worship on the Preparation of Easter n. 23*)
3. Catechesis should remind the faithful that the important aspect of Lent is seen in conversion of heart, prayer, fasting and charity rather than the reception of ashes.



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II. PALM SUNDAY

1. Use either the Solemn Entrance (Form II) or the Simple Entrance (Form III, no blessing of palms before the Mass) as the situation and time permits.
2. To follow any civil rules on timing, only one reading (Isaiah or Philippians) can be read before the Passion Gospel. If absolutely necessary, only the Passion Gospel may be read omitting the first two readings and psalm (cf. Lectionary for Mass on Palm Sunday).
3. Distribution of blessed palms to the faithful depends on the situation of each parish/country.
 - a. It is preferred in the current situation that the faithful are told beforehand to bring their own palms/green branches for blessing.
 - b. If any palm branches are distributed (also to those who cannot attend), full precautions should be taken.

III. HOLY THURSDAY

1. I authorize that the evening Mass of Holy Thursday may be celebrated multiple times throughout the whole day but only if a congregation is present.
 - In all Masses, the Washing of the Feet and the Procession with the Blessed Sacrament at the end of Mass is omitted.
 - The Blessed Sacrament is placed in the tabernacle after Communion, and Mass ends as usual (with blessing and dismissal).
2. However, in the last/main Mass of the day, the transfer of the Blessed Sacrament to an altar of repose can take place.

IV. GOOD FRIDAY

1. I authorize the repetition of the afternoon liturgical service throughout Good Friday.
 - a. The pandemic prayer given last year by the Holy See for the Solemn Intercessions is used also this year.
 - b. The veneration of the Cross will be done by all together as given in the missal, after the presider venerates the Cross.
 - c. As a special permission, only one reading (Isaiah or Hebrews) may be used before the Gospel where it is a question of time.
2. Instead of repeating the liturgical service, priests can also have other shorter liturgical or devotional services e.g. the Liturgy of the Hours, the Stations of the Cross, etc.

V. HOLY SATURDAY

For the Easter Vigil celebrations, I will give further indications later, and possibly there may be some indications also from the Holy See. Of course, as a special case, the Easter Vigil Mass could be celebrated many times on Holy Saturday, but the question is the length. Even with using the minimum possible readings, and all the abbreviations given last year by the Holy See, it is often not possible to celebrate even a brief Vigil in time constraints given by the civil authorities.



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VI. OTHER MATTERS

Christian Initiation: In view of the time constraints, priests can postpone the Baptism and Confirmation of the adult catechumens to another Mass in the Easter Octave.

General absolution: may be given before all the celebrations of the Holy Triduum (Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday).

Chrism Mass: the date and time will be communicated to all before Holy Week. As for last year, there will not be the gathering of all the priests from different parishes for this Mass for safety reasons.

Bishop Paul Hinder OFM Cap
Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia