

Dear Parishioners:

I have shared this letter with all Lay Ministers prior to the Florida Governor declaring a shutdown of our state for a month and possibly longer. Many of you have decided to go back to north some time ago, some maybe leaving at this moment, some are permanent residents in Fort Myers, wherever you may be, please accept my best wishes of health and humble blessing.

Holy Week will begin this Sunday with Palm Sunday, this Holy Week especially will remain in our memories forever and in future generations for an unprecedented tragedy forcing the entire world to think seriously about what type life we want for generations to come.

Since at this time we do not know how much worse this will become, here is my reflection.

In 1972, members of the Uruguay Rugby team were stranded over 11,000 feet high in the Andes mountains for 72 days. Chilean miners were trapped in a mine 2,296 feet underground for 69 days in 2010. A soccer team in Thailand got trapped in a cave for 12 days in 2018. They were all exposed to low temperatures, with no food and very uncomfortable conditions. Yet when we are asked to stay home with all the comforts of electricity, water, cable, wifi and food, we complain about not being able to go out, and about being bored. At this time, we should appreciate that our homes are the best place of refuge for us. For Christians, our homes have now become our domestic church.

We learn in Exodus 12:6-7 that the Hebrews marked their separation from Egypt by going into their homes, shutting their doors, and marking them with the blood of their offering – a rejection of the Egyptian sheep deity. All of this would serve as a sign of their devotion to God. On the evening of the Israelites' deliverance from slavery, they slaughtered the lamb, roasted and ate it. The lambs' blood was placed on the doorposts of their houses as a sign that Israelites lived in those homes.

In Isaiah 26:20-21, we learn how the Lord advised Israel through the words of the prophet in times of infidelity; "Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. See the LORD is coming out of his swelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed on it; the earth will conceal its slain no longer".

The coronavirus crisis should be a call to reject our godless society. Although gathering for church services has been suspended, Church is not over, it is a fighting mother. There may not be people in the church building, but the church is in the people of God; there may not be processions on the street, but the rosary can still be prayed. There may not be confessions, but we can always practice repentance. There may be no catechesis, but parents can still be teaching their children how to be good Christians, we all can now read more the Bible.

This crisis threatens to extend beyond the health crisis, and bring down the world economy. It is not a time to ignore, replace or banish our God, but a time to turn to God, who alone can save us from this disaster.

We must turn to God with sincere prayer, sacrifice and penance. Our churches at home could include an altar, or perhaps family time watching services on television. No matter how you create your church at home, please be continuously praying to God for each other and particularly for those directly affected by this pandemic and all men and women in the medical community.

Turning to God requires an adjustment in our loves in the face of a world that rejects God's law and constantly moves toward its destruction. It means acting as the Church has always acted; with common sense, wisdom, charity, and, above all, faith and confidence. All of these Church remedies, full of comfort and healing, are within the grasp of the faithful.

Turning to God does not mean that we deny the role of the government in handling our public health emergencies. However, Faith must be a major component of any solution. God is with us. We should confide in the Blessed Sacrament, the Real Presence of God in the world and in our lives.

The doors to our places of worship are closed; but now, more than ever, we must be open to using creative measures for evangelization. The real church is in each one of us, the real body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we are everywhere.

Please, stay home, stay in your domestic church where everything began, where our Catholic Church began and persevered for 20 centuries. Let us be part of the solution and not part of the problem. Take time to consolidate your relationship with your love ones wherever they may be and with God the Father and Creator. It is not easy and we must make an effort to do it.

My brother priests and I are having daily masses, and I bring to the altar the beautiful and joyful faces I had the privilege to meet when we were at St. Columbkille. How blessed I have been when presiding the Holy Mass on weekends, the church was packed, we prayed together and sung together, but now is it time to become a DOMESTIC CHURCH, at home. Jesus stayed in the desert for 40 days on retreat and inspired on him, we have created the season of Lent (40 days) to prepare for Easter. Now, quarantine means 40 days we can perfectly use as personal and family retreat like never before. THE DOMESTIC CHURCH IS ON RETREAT to prepare ourselves to meet with the Lord.

I would like to share these two options for online masses, you may have others.

The Mass celebrated by Bishop Frank J. Dewane from the Catholic Center each day at 9:15 a.m. at: <https://www.facebook.com/DioceseofVenice/>. (Note, you do not need a Facebook account to view the Mass.) Also, the Mass is accessible on the homepage of the Diocese website at [www.dioceseofvenice.org](http://www.dioceseofvenice.org).

Bishop Robert Barron "Word on Fire" has added a link to his Daily Gospel Reflections so you can watch daily Mass online. It is celebrated at his chapel, and the video which lasts less than 30 min includes a

brief homily. It is an alternate opportunity to hear daily Mass during this time of the Coronavirus.  
<http://dailycatholicgospel.com/>

For PALM SUNDAY “Communion under the Portico” (Drive way of St. Columbkille) will be from 11am – 2pm. There is no need to exit your car. PLEASE DO NOT COME IN A BICYCLE OR WALKING. Palms will be giving out. Thank you very much for continuing supporting the Parish financially, I know that this is a very difficult time for all of us and for some even worse, thank you.

If you need to contact me, call the office or email me at [lgonzalez@stcolumbkille.com](mailto:lgonzalez@stcolumbkille.com).

Many Blessings and peace,

Fr. Lorenzo J. Gonzalez