

## A Letter from Fr. Richard Ballard, parochial vicar, Our Lady of the Rosary Church

Dear OLR family and friends,

Fr. Longenecker has asked me to write a letter to you and address several topics of concern about which we should all be mindful until circumstances return to a more normal way of life for us and the church.

As we are all staying at home as much as possible, and practicing good social isolating and/or distancing, we hope that you are staying well and taking care of yourself during this coronavirus crisis. The near shut down of our parish, and many other institutions and businesses in our area, has caused many people to have increased levels of anxiety and stress regarding their own health and well being, and that of their loved ones. Please be assured that the clergy and staff of OLR are thinking of you and praying for you, and are spiritually close to you during this difficult time.

While we endeavor to deal with these new realities as best we are able, it is important to practice self-care and to follow official advice as we receive it. The World Health Organization and our own Centers for Disease Control have offered the following tips on how to help prevent contracting the COVID 19 virus, and even though we may have heard about them before, it is still helpful to review best practices. The WHO and CDC advises us to:

Wash our hands frequently.

If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Avoid touching our face.

Sneeze and cough into a tissue or your elbow.

Avoid crowds and standing near others.

Stay home if you think you might be sick.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately.

Emergency warning signs include:

- High fever

- Trouble breathing

- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest

New confusion or inability to wake someone up or get them to respond to you in a coherent manner.

Bluish lips or face

These are all good, commonsense suggestions, and we hope that you are following them closely. I am trying to stringently follow these guidelines, not only because I want to stay well myself, but also because of the vulnerability of my wife, Ruth. Many of you are already aware that Ruth suffers from several chronic and disabling medical conditions, including some lung issues, all of which cause her to be more vulnerable to this disease. She rarely gets out and about, and the appearance of this new, dangerous virus gives us both concern. So, we sympathize with those of you who are having to take even more precautions than those that are minimally recommended.

Even as we seek to avoid catching this virus, it is also important to try to maintain and maximize the quality of our overall health and immune system. There are some practical, science backed ways of doing just that, including limiting one's alcohol intake, reducing stress in your life, eating a healthy diet, making sure that one's Vitamin D level is optimal, getting enough sleep, practicing good hygiene, getting adequate exercise, and not smoking. The highly regarded Prevention magazine and website, now in its 70th year of providing trustworthy and factual health information, elaborates on all of these approaches here:

<https://www.prevention.com/health/a31286522/how-to-boost-immune-system/>

In addition to focusing on good physical and emotional health, it is also crucial for us to nurture our spiritual health as well. Even though access to Mass and the sacraments is severely limited at this time, we must remember that the Church gives us many additional resources to help us while we wait for life to return to normal. Reading the Sacred Scriptures, prayer (such as the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet, Stations of the Cross and many others), using the Liturgy of the Word that we send out weekly, listening to our recorded homilies, watching televised Masses, reading about the lives of the saints, using sacramentals (such as a crucifix, holy water, the brown scapular, religious medals, holy cards), and more. If you have not already done so, now would be a good time to create a home altar or prayer corner. Here is a link to a site that gives suggestions on how to do that:

<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/a-chapel-to-remember>

Now, just a word about what to do if you, or a loved one, becomes seriously ill. As you know, the Bishop has decided that the priests of our diocese are not allowed to celebrate the Mass publicly, hear confessions, make pastoral visits in parishioners homes or in the hospital, or do any other public ministry that might cause either the priest or other persons to contract the virus. The Bishop has given priests permission to “continue to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick for those in danger of death,” but has asked us to “exercise prudence and common sense,” and has told us that “if a person is designated as "quarantined or at risk," even at home, please do not put your health or the health of others at risk by visiting.” So, as you see, even this possibility is severely restricted. In fact, the hospitals are not even allowing clergy to enter the building to visit the sick.

So, when should a priest be called? If you, or a loved one, are beginning to be in danger of death, certainly you should notify a priest. As the clergy are not being admitted to hospitals, you should call before the person is taken to the hospital. Call our emergency answering service (877-598-3974) and give them the details. The answering service will call one of us. When notified, the priest will do what he is able to do, he will pray for you, and give counsel, and if possible, he will administer the Sacrament of Anointing. If, however, even that becomes impossible, every Catholic should know how to make an act of perfect contrition. In extraordinary circumstances when sacramental confession and anointing are not available to us, we can make an act of perfect contrition which is sufficient to obtain forgiveness of our sins, even mortal ones. How is this done?

If a person expresses sorrow for sin because of some lesser reason (they are ashamed, they are afraid they will go to hell), that is called imperfect contrition, and it requires sacramental absolution for forgiveness to be received. However, if we are sorry for our sins because we love God above all else, and are sorry that because of our sins we have grievously offended and displeased him, then that is perfect contrition, and through that sorrow, all sins are forgiven.

At the commencement of World War II, St. Maximilian Kolbe wrote a letter to teach his followers how to receive forgiveness for their sins when it would be difficult or impossible to find a priest to hear their confession. He wrote: "Whoever can, should receive the Sacrament of Penance. Whoever cannot, because of prohibiting circumstances, should cleanse his soul by acts

of perfect contrition: i.e., the sorrow of a loving child who does not consider so much the pain or reward, as he does the pardon from his father and mother to whom he has brought displeasure.”

The traditional Act of Contrition expresses this very well (note the phrases in bold print):

“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and **I detest all my sins**, because I dread the loss of heaven, and the pains of hell; but **most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love**. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.”

As part of making an act of perfect contrition, the individual must resolve to go to confession and receive the Sacrament of Penance as soon as it is possible.

Finally, if death does come to someone in your family, funerals are still possible, and we should be notified of the death. Again, call our emergency answering service (877-598-3974) and give them the details. The answering service will call one of us. However, you should know that the Bishop has decreed that: “funerals may be permitted privately, but attendance must be limited to immediate family.” In such an occurrence the clergy and funeral directors will advise you on the best course of action regarding both the funeral service and internment or cremation.

During these difficult and challenging days, let us all seek to remain spiritually united to our Lord and Savior and to his Church. Let us turn our home into a “domestic church” and frequently offer there a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God. Let us above all pray for each other, and pray that, in his mercy, God would take from us this pestilence, give courage, wisdom and strength to the professionals who are dealing with it directly, heal and restore those who are sick from it, and grant mercy and pardon to those who have died.

Please know that all of you remain in my thoughts and prayers, and that I will be remembering you and your intentions at each private Mass I offer. May God bless and keep you.

In Christ and his Blessed Mother,

Fr. Richard

