



# Catholic Archdiocese of Accra

## **PASTORAL LETTER** **TO ALL CHRIST'S FAITHFUL** **IN THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ACCRA**

My Dear People of God,

The Peace of the Lord be with you.

### **Introduction**

I come to you in this season of Lent when many are living in anxiety and fear on account of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) ravaging our world and which has led to a lockdown of our society. Socio-economic life and religious activities have been seriously affected. In some countries, streets have been deserted and some businesses are collapsing. These are indeed trying times for each individual and indeed for people of faith. Directives issued by the Government of Ghana are preventive measures in order to stop the spread of this virus. The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference has not only asked our Catholic faithful to obey the Directives of the Government but also added a few guidelines and recommendations as internal mechanisms to help us stay healthy and alive. We must join hands together and mobilize our efforts in the fight against Coronavirus.

### **The Church Cares for You**

Your Archbishop, Priests and Religious remain united with you and are close to you in this time of panic on account of the Coronavirus. We are very much concerned about you and your health. You are at the centre of our daily prayers and Holy Masses. In these difficult times, people of faith can easily succumb to the temptation of the devil by putting God to the test. The voice of the devil tells us to put aside caution by submitting ourselves to unnecessary dangers or risks believing that our faith will deliver us. We forget that "in faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace" (CCC, 155). Faith in God does not ask us to throw away our capacity to reason. St. Augustine said, "I believe in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe". Remember that the sin of tempting God as is depicted by one of the three temptations of Jesus reported in the Gospels is real to our life of faith each day. The devil says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for Scripture says, "He has given His angels orders about you, and they will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone". Jesus' response is loud and clear, "Scripture also says, do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Mt 4:6-7; Lk 4:9-12). Anytime we throw caution to the wind, believing that the Lord will take care of us, we are putting God to the test.

I encourage you to meticulously follow the social distancing precaution and prescriptions on personal hygiene not only for your sake but for the sake of your neighbour while we remain persistent in prayer. Your Bishops, Priests and Religious are helping you stay alive so that you continuously praise and glorify the eternal Father (cf. Is 38:18-19a). This is indeed what God requires from us; to stay alive and praise Him.

### **The Church Accompanies You**

My Dear Brothers and Sisters, be assured that:

1. You are not left alone in this time of crisis. Your Church fully accompanies you in these difficult times. COVID-19 has made these times strange and abnormal. We therefore cannot go about our daily engagements as if times are normal. We shall, however, not allow fear and panic to overcome us; rather we shall be sustained by our faith in Jesus who tells us “I am with you always until the end of time” (Mt 28:20).
2. Your Church is not closed on you in this time of crisis. The doors of your Parish Churches remain open for private prayer and Eucharistic adoration while observing the directive on social distancing. Visit the Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament at any time of your choice to make your private prayer.
3. Your Archbishop, Priests and Religious will continue to pray for you even if we cannot come together as a congregation. We remain close to you and serve you. We will celebrate *Missa pro populo* or “Mass for the people” everyday while strictly adhering to the guideline of not more than five participants. *Missa pro populo* is obligatory for pastors of souls for the people they serve. We will offer Masses and pray for your intentions and ask for spiritual benefits for you. During this Holy Mass, individual intentions will not be mentioned and stipends will not be taken. This is a non-negotiable duty of pastors of souls. We shall also pray the Divine Office (the Church’s Official Prayer) daily for you and for your special intentions. We owe this to you as your Pastors

### **Interventions through Media Broadcasts**

During this time of social restrictions, the Communication Department of the Archdiocese (DEPSOCOM) will stream Weekday Masses live on Television at 6.30am, 12.30pm and 5.30pm and Sunday Masses at 8.00am to be aired on Crystal TV Plus in collaboration with *Lumen Christi* Ghana. These Masses will also be streamed live online on radio and via Facebook and other social media platforms by Radio Angelus. I invite you to participate from the comfort of your homes and receive Spiritual Communion in order to “renew, strengthen and deepen our incorporation into the Church received through baptism” (CCC, 1396). These media houses will also live-stream the Stations of the Cross every Friday at 5.30pm. In addition, some Parish Priests have also mentioned initiatives being put in place in their parishes to reach you through social media. The Church cannot and will not abandon you!

## **Your Role as Families**

On your part, I encourage you to strengthen the life of the “Domestic Church” or the family. The Christian family or home provides a fertile ground for the growth of the Church. Your family is that “little Church” where the basic lessons of Christian discipleship and holiness are taught and lived through the evangelical example of parents to their children or wards. Remember the adage that “the family that prays together, stays together”. As movements are restricted, families have more time to share quality time together through prayer in order to strengthen the bond of unity and love. God uses difficult moments to manifest Himself and is certainly using this time to strengthen family life.

## **A Time for Prayers and Devotions**

The Lenten season re-enforces the call to intensify our prayer life. Let us use the rich devotional prayers we have as Church. We know the benefits we derive from these devotional prayers. This moment of crisis permits us to get closer to God by intensifying our prayer life. As a faith community, we are ready to offer the world the weapon of prayer in the fight against COVID-19. God, through our prayers, will heal our land. He assures us, “when we call to me and come and pray to me, I shall listen to you. When you search for me, you will find me ... I shall restore your fortunes” (Jer 29:12-14a).

Let us unite spiritually during this trying moment to pray the **Chaplet of Divine Mercy** at 3:00pm from our homes or wherever we may be. We shall implore the Lord’s mercy and protection through this chain of prayer. I also encourage you to do the devotion to the **Holy Name of Jesus**. This devotion has been attested to as powerful in times of trials. Jesus Himself said “whatever you ask Me in my Name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (Jn 14:13). Pray the **Angelus** in the morning, at noon and in the evening. Don’t forget to pray your **Rosary** to call on the maternal intercession of our Mother Mary in these difficult times. These, and many others, are spiritual exercises that have defined our Catholic identity over the years. Let us revisit them in these trying times and strengthen our families through these practices. The Bishops of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) have also provided a prayer against Coronavirus to be used. The Mission Office of the Archdiocese has prepared prayer booklets to be distributed in all parishes. The booklets contain some of these traditional Catholic prayers. I desire that each family will use these prayers in the fight against COVID-19 and also for their own prayer needs. We believe that our prayers will heal our world.

## **Living the Lenten Season**

The Lenten season offers an opportunity “to return to the Lord with all your heart” (Joel 2:12). Unfortunately, the panic caused by Coronavirus has afforded others the opportunity to exploit their suffering neighbours. Life is getting more difficult. The prices of goods and services are soaring. People who take advantage of their suffering brothers and sisters lack mercy. They inflict pain on others by exacting more from

them in the market place. Market women and shop keepers say to themselves, "it is our time to make more money on the suffering masses". This is not Christian. Let us not take advantage of the needy and suffering.

The Lenten observance calls us to also fast and give alms as sincere signs of repentance. Isaiah warns that we cannot sincerely fast when we continue to exploit our neighbours, quarrel and fight, engage in violent acts and cause pain to others. A sincere fast, on the other hand, is to break down any system that enslaves and oppresses; it is to ensure that the hungry person is fed, the homeless is housed and the naked is clothed (cf. Is 58:3-8).

### **Conclusion**

In this trying moment, we shall do everything possible to respect social distancing at public places and enhance personal hygiene by practices such as washing our hands with soap regularly and covering our mouth and nose with our arm when coughing or sneezing. May God recognize our Lenten observance of prayer, fast and almsgiving, and intervene to heal our world of COVID-19.

May Mary our Mother, the Help of Christians and Health of the Sick, pray for us.



**MOST REV. JOHN BONAVENTURE KWOFIE**  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Accra and  
Apostolic Administrator of Sekondi-Takoradi Diocese



Given the 19<sup>th</sup> day of March 2020, on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of Mary.