

Vatican: Easter date can not be changed, despite coronavirus



Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Credit: Bohumil Petrik/CNA



By [Hannah Brockhaus](#)

Vatican City, Mar 20, 2020 / 09:30 am (CNA).- The Vatican department for liturgy published guidelines Friday for bishops and priests on the celebration of Holy Week, the Triduum, and Easter liturgies during the coronavirus pandemic.

The document recommends that bishops postpone those liturgies which may be postponed. It also indicates how priests and bishops can offer those celebrations which cannot be moved, such as Easter, in places where public liturgies are suspended.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments published the "general indications" after receiving inquiries from several bishops.

The decree was signed by the congregation's prefect Cardinal Robert Sarah and Secretary Archbishop Arthur Roche and authorized "by mandate of the Supreme Pontiff, for the year 2020 only," meaning that the recommendations cannot be used in future years.

"Easter is the heart of the entire liturgical year and is not simply one feast among others," the document states, and that the Easter Triduum "cannot be transferred to another time."

The congregation's document also says that the bishop has faculties to postpone the Chrism Mass of Holy Week. The Paschal Triduum is the three days leading up to and including Easter Sunday. It begins at sundown Holy Thursday and ends on sundown Easter Sunday.

The decree orders that, in the places where there are restrictions from civil and Church authorities, the bishop, in agreement with the bishops' conference, may offer the liturgies of the Easter Triduum in the cathedral, and priests of the diocese may offer the liturgies in their parishes, without the physical presence of the faithful.

"The faithful should be informed of the times of the celebration so that they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes," it indicates, adding that live television or internet broadcasts are helpful in this situation.

Dioceses and bishops' conferences should provide resources to support families and individuals in personal prayer, it adds.

The document also provides several suggestions for the offering of the particular liturgies by priests and bishops.

All priests may offer Holy Thursday's Mass of the Lord's Supper in a suitable place, without the public, it says, but the washing of the feet, which is already optional, should be omitted.

The procession of the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose at the end of Mass should also be omitted and the Blessed Sacrament should remain in the tabernacle.

Good Friday's service of the Passion of the Lord may be celebrated in cathedrals and parish churches, the congregation said, and the universal prayers should include an intention for the sick, the dead, and those who feel lost and dismayed.

The guidelines indicate that the Easter Vigil may only be offered in cathedrals and parish churches, "where, and in the measure that there is a real possibility of doing so, established by the one responsible."

The preparing and lighting of the fire during the "Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium" is omitted, it says. The Paschal Candle is lit, the procession is omitted, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) follows.

The Mass proceeds as usual, apart from the "Baptismal Liturgy," where "the renewal of baptismal promises alone is necessary," it explains.

The document states that "those who have absolutely no possibility of uniting themselves to the Paschal Vigil celebrated in a church should pray the Office of Readings for Easter Sunday."

Processions and other devotions of popular piety that usually take place during Holy Week and the Easter Triduum can be transferred by the diocesan bishop to other days during the year, such as September 14 and 15, it states.

Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic, 20.03.2020

The gift of special Indulgences is granted to the faithful suffering from COVID-19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Rom 12: 12). The words written by Saint Paul to the Church of Rome resonate throughout the entire history of the Church and guide the judgment of the faithful in the face of all suffering, sickness and calamity.

The present moment in which the whole of humanity, threatened by an invisible and insidious disease, which for some time now has become part of all our lives, is marked day after day by anguished fears, new uncertainties and above all widespread physical and moral suffering.

The Church, following the example of her Divine Master, has always had the care of the sick at heart. As Saint John Paul II points out, the value of human suffering is twofold: “It is supernatural because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission” (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 31).

Pope Francis, too, in these recent days, has shown his paternal closeness and renewed his invitation to pray incessantly for those who are sick with the Coronavirus.

So that all those who suffer because of COVID-19, precisely in the mystery of this suffering, may rediscover “the same redemptive suffering of Christ” (ibid., 30), this Apostolic Penitentiary, *ex auctoritate Summi Pontificis*, trusting in the word of Christ the Lord and considering with a spirit of faith the epidemic currently underway, to be lived in a spirit of personal conversion, grants the gift of Indulgences in accordance with the following disposition.

The Plenary Indulgence is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible.

Health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine Redeemer: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15: 13), will obtain the same gift of the Plenary Indulgence under the same conditions.

This Apostolic Penitentiary also willingly grants a Plenary Indulgence under the same conditions on the occasion of the current world epidemic, also to those faithful who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, to implore from

Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself.

The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the Viaticum, entrusting each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a Plenary Indulgence on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. *Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, no.12).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, Health of the Sick and Help of Christians, our Advocate, help suffering humanity, saving us from the evil of this pandemic and obtaining for us every good necessary for our salvation and sanctification.

The present Decree is valid notwithstanding any provision to the contrary.

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary, on 19
March 2020.

Mauro Cardinal Piacenza
Major Penitentiary