



Archevêque de Montréal

Pastoral Letter:

Jesus is knocking at the door of our heart

March 20, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past week, day after day, there has been a gradual escalation of the fight against COVID-19. In the diocese, we started by suspending Sunday masses as of last weekend. The very next day, Monday, we announced the cancellation of all weekday masses, as well as all pastoral and liturgical events.

From the outset, it has been all about avoiding different kinds of public gatherings and maintaining social distancing, about one to two metres. Regarding the acceptable size of groups, directives went from a 250-person limit to 50, then even a minimum number of participants was being discouraged. This is why, knowing that a given church could still be open and visited by several people at the same time, I now ask that all **our places of worship – churches and chapels – without exception, be closed to the public until further notice.**

All of us find this restriction on church access very painful, because each church is a house of prayer. Just think of the elderly who have always received the Eucharist. How do we connect with them? How do all those affected by this pandemic connect with their parishes? Together, let us find innovative ways to be present and united in the mission; let's share the good ideas generated with one another.

Pope Francis has asked us to reach out to those on the periphery. The crisis through which we are now living can be embraced as an opportunity to learn how to do just that. It can be seen as an opportunity to re-evaluate how reachable we are, how available we are, and how well we respond to our neighbors' needs.

Oftentimes, people of faith, families who pray and thriving parishes feel as though they are alone, the only ones embracing faith. How can we move beyond this impression and rediscover that the diocese of Montreal is filled with fervent, courageous People of God? Cancelling public masses does not mean that there are no more masses. I thank my brother priests for celebrating mass in private every day, and through the Holy Spirit, for presenting Christ's offering to our Almighty Father together with the intentions of the faithful for the world and the Church. I welcome initiatives where mass is celebrated "in camera" and broadcast on television, radio or the Internet.

I thank all those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours (Breviary): priests, deacons, men and women of consecrated life and lay faithful who do so. The Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the Church and it is an essential ministry. I thank all those who, in their homes, pray the rosary, read the Bible reflectively and glorify God in spirit and truth.

Let us remember that Lent, even the very unusual one through which we are journeying this year, is an intensive time of prayer and fasting, of generosity and sharing. May the Holy Spirit help us to be creative and to remain open to the needs of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

For an undetermined period, the doors of our churches are closed, but our hearts are open to the call of Jesus: “Look, **I am standing at the door, knocking**. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side.” (Rv 3:20).

May St. Joseph invoke God's blessing on the world and the Church,
May Mary intercede for our protection,
May the Sacred Heart of Jesus show you his mercy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montréal