



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

8 April 2020

A Message for Easter 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This year I am sharing my annual Easter Message to you in a context that I would never have anticipated, never even have imagined! We are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that is keeping us out of our beloved churches. We know this is necessary because of the public health imperative in which we find ourselves, but it is still deeply painful. Especially now! Here we are in the midst of Holy Week, the most solemn liturgical time of the year, and our churches, normally filled far beyond overflowing, stand empty. That has left more than a few people wondering how to celebrate Easter this year. Allow me to share a few thoughts with you on that.

First, let's not forget that mass continues to be offered, even without the physical presence of the faithful. Mass is offered by the priest privately, yet through the wonder of livestreaming we can all join in and still receive by desire the grace of sacramental communion. It is not the norm, of course, and certainly not the best way to celebrate, but it is nevertheless a genuine participation. So, please, check the schedule of livestreamed masses and join in. As we do with the usual celebration of mass in our churches, prepare yourself beforehand by self-examination and an act of contrition, and also by reading before mass the Scripture texts assigned that you'll hear proclaimed. Remember to give thanks to God afterward for the wondrous gift of the mass and the encounter with the real presence of Christ that occurs within it.

That is the principal and necessary way to celebrate Easter, but there is also more we can consider. The death and resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate at Easter calls us to conversion, to a whole new way of life with him. Celebrating Easter, then, means examining in what ways my life needs to change so as to be more in accord with the Gospel. What might this involve? In the suggestions that follow, I take my cue from some of the practices we have adopted to stay well during the pandemic.

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For example, we've become quite accustomed to sanitizing our hands as a preventative measure. Might my relationships use some sanitizing also? Think of social media. Heavy doses of sanitizer need to be poured over the gossip, vitriol and slander that characterize many of the interactions happening on various platforms. Social distancing has become an act of charity when practiced out of concern for the health of others. There are other forms of distancing, though, that result in harming the other, when they are motivated by racism, bigotry, indifference and fear. That needs to stop. I notice, as you have, that some people have not been paying attention to the public health directives issued by civic authorities, potentially putting the physical health of themselves and others at risk. How have I not been paying attention to, and following, the directives of God – we call them the commandments – thus placing my soul in peril? We've been discovering that many of the things we trusted in as reliable for security are anything but. We can learn from this and turn once again to God as the sole reliable basis of hope.

Easter is not a commemoration of an event that happened 2000 years ago but has no relevance today. No. The Risen Lord Jesus remains with his people, calling us to new life and new hope, and constantly pours out his grace upon us to make the change of life possible. Celebrating Easter means allowing the Lord to change our lives now so that we can live always in peace, joy and hope. Let's do that.

Happy Easter and God bless,



✠Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton