



PASTORAL LETTER AND DECREE FROM THE BISHOP
on 19th March 2020, the Solemnity of St. Joseph.

CORONAVIRUS

Dear Faithful and Clergy of the Diocese of Portsmouth,

"I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Yes, I have given you power to tread underfoot serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you" (Luke 10: 18-19).

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing much harm and concern to us all, both at home and abroad. We do not know why God in His providence has allowed this pandemic to occur. What we *do* know is that He has given us victory through the death and resurrection of His Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ and poured into human history the power of the Holy Spirit to guide all things in the right direction. This is why, in the words of St. Paul, we know that *nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked. ... These are the trials by which we triumph by the power of Him who loved us.* Indeed, we can be certain that *neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power or height or depth, nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom 8: 35-36, 38-39).

As Catholics, we must tackle this crisis with spiritual as well as human resources. Let us work for an end to this scourge. Let us keep our churches open for prayer and offer daily Mass for the Church and the world. Let us proclaim God's Word, administer the Sacraments and offer pastoral care to God's people in their need. Indeed, the ministry of prayer at this time is crucial. Let us pray for a speedy solution, for those who are sick, for the protection of the elderly and the vulnerable, for those in self-isolation, for all who are suffering anxiety and worry, for the homeless and needy, for the well-being and financial security of all, for the NHS medical staff and all who care for the sick, and for the repose of those who have died.

In advance, I thank our clergy and parish ministers for their generosity and willingness to minister in new and different ways during this crisis. Let us be inspired by St. Camillus, St. Juliana Falconieri, Bl. Pier Giorgio and the many other saints from Church history - not least by the Lord Himself - who cared for the sick and infected, amidst great personal danger and difficulty.

I attach to this Pastoral Letter a Decree with some new norms that now become particular law for this Diocese of Portsmouth. I add to these a few pastoral guidelines, some spiritual, others practical, to help us all over the days ahead. All these provisions come into place today, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, and will remain in place until further notification. Lent is a time of penance, prayer and charity: we will remember this Lent and Easter for many years ahead. So let us call on the efficacious prayers and help of St. Joseph. Just as he protected the Infant Jesus, Saviour of the World, and his spouse, the Blessed Virgin Mary, may he help us now, during this time of emergency.

Assuring you of my prayers and best wishes

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth