

Dear people of God,
Peace!

The Directorate of Religious Education of Osogbo Diocese regrets to inform you that due to Covid-19 Pandemic, the printing of our regular booklet publications had been suspended until the last quarter of the year. We encourage you to continue with the online arrangements for the "Deepening the Faith" program and still continue to send your comments, contributions and questions to our email address. Thank you for your usual understanding and cooperation. God bless

Sr Dr Omojola Immaculata Olu,SSMA
DRE, Osogbo Diocese

JULY

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR DATE: 05/07/2020

THEME FOR THE MONTH: SOCIAL LOCK DOWN: IMPLICATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Opening Prayer: Let the facilitator invite a member for the opening prayer.

INTRODUCTION: Let the facilitator revise the topic of last week with the audience briefly.

Step 1: Facilitator introduces the theme for the week: **DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY**

Step 2: Specific Biblical Passages are read: Hebrews 10:25, Matthew 18: 20, I Corinthians 5:4, Acts 4: 31, Acts 12:12, Acts 14:27

Step 3: Sharing: Members are allowed to share their experiences in relation to the readings heard.

Questions to Ponder:

What is the difference between spiritual communion and the actual reception of the Holy Eucharist?

How is "religion" different from "spirituality"?

Why is it important for Christians not to forsake the gathering of the children of God (Church)?

Step 4: Teaching: The facilitator will encourage the audience with these words: COVID-19 has negatively impacted many aspects of our lives and well-being. It has changed a lot of things about us. However, even in these days of fears, confusion and helplessness about the pandemic, there might still be many positives that have encouraged spiritual

growth in our lives? We will focus our reflections this month on the implications of social lockdown in relation to spiritual growth. The ban on religious public worship and social interactions has forced every one of us to adjust. The ban has negatively impacted on several aspects of our lives and well-being because we are a people of great affinity for coming together in order to socialize, celebrate and worship God. One thing that COVID-19 has been able to do for many Nigerian Christians is to differentiate religion from spirituality. At this time of the ban on religious gathering (even despite the partial ease), many have been able to realize that a person's spirituality is neither a once-a-week experience nor merely going to the church like a Sunday-Sunday medicine. Spirituality is central to who we are and it must reflect in all we do as well, whether we are at home, in the work-place, school or wherever we may find ourselves. Then, does it mean that going to church on Sundays for Holy Masses is not important? Is it enough to listen to Mass on the TV and receive spiritual communion as we have been doing since the pandemic lockdown? The answer to the above questions is **NO!** Going to church on Sunday and other days of the week is a very important aspect of our calling as children of God. In fact, we are commanded to do so. We don't go to church to pray alone. We go to church to experience the inherent togetherness and fellowship with the other brethren, as well as receiving encouragement to deepen our faith in God and understanding the Word. Any special dispensation (such as partial easing), given on religious gathering is to help the people of God to reconnect with their heavenly father. Gathering together as children of God is not merely proposed in the Bible, it is actually commanded. Growth in faith is greatly beneficial through the variety of Christian examples seen around us. Hence, it is obligatory to gather with other children of God. We are told in the letter to the Hebrews to "meet each other's needs and to encourage and inspire other Christians." (Heb. 3:13). The Letter to the Hebrews was addressed to believers who had "endured a great struggle with suffering" (Heb. 10:32). Even in their struggles, they "joyfully accepted the plundering of their property" (Heb. 10:34), although after a while, some of them were discouraged and found it difficult to keep the faith. Therefore, it was necessary for the Letter to the Hebrews to be written in order to prevent a repeat of such backsliding. It is important for us at this strange and difficult time to continually make every effort to keep and strengthen our faith, praying for the commanded togetherness to resume without further delay. We must accept that going to Church is very important but certainly not all that is required of us as Christians. As we go to church in the current ease of religious gathering, let us try to nourish our relationship with God, continue to improve on our faith at home, and without neglecting the togetherness avenues with the other children of God.

Step 5: Questions and Answers: Allow the audience to ask some questions.

Step 6: TASK: Let the participants agree on a task that is practicable.

SUGGESTED TASK: Give someone a call on phone to encourage the person's faith.

Step 7: Evaluation: The facilitator will ask some of the members to summarize the teaching of the day.

Step 8: Ask a member to conclude with a prayer.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR DATE: 12/07/2020

THEME FOR THE MONTH: SOCIAL LOCK DOWN: IMPLICATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Opening Prayer: Let the facilitator invite a member for the opening prayer.

INTRODUCTION: Let the facilitator revise the topic of last week with the audience briefly.

Step 1: Facilitator introduces the theme for the week: **EVERY CATHOLIC HOME IS A DOMESTIC CHURCH: AN ADVANTAGE IN SOCIAL LOCKDOWN**

Step 2: Specific Biblical Passages are read: Deuteronomy 6: 5-9, Philippians 4:6-7, Proverbs 31: 10-12, 28-29, Ephesians 4: 26-27, I Peter 5: 7-8.

Step 3: Sharing: Members are allowed to share their experiences in relation to the readings heard.

Questions to Ponder:

1. Why is the family referred to as a domestic church?
2. What are the benefits of coming together to worship in the church?
3. Is there anything like family spirituality?
4. What are the roles of parents in the domestic church?

Step 4: Teaching: The facilitator will encourage the audience with these words:

The Church has since rightly implanted in us that the Christian family is a domestic church but there has never been a time that the statement is more meaningful to us than now when covid-19 pandemic has led to the government's ban on public religious worships. As Christians, we usually turn to God in prayer whenever things are not going well with us. Unfortunately for some time now, our churches had been closed due to corona virus pandemic and a lot of Christians are sad and confused about it. Prior to the current lockdown ease, christians were advised to pray at home with the well-known provisions of several liturgical and prayer resources. Truly, many of us listened to audio Masses, following the priests in liturgical services but the call to pray at home places greater responsibility on us as Christians. All children of God should exploit a free access to Him (Ephesians 2:8); all baptised Catholics possess a priestly responsibility of praying for themselves and interceding for others (I Peter 2:9). Many Catholic Christians during the lockdown, especially those

faithful to their prayers, have realized and utilised the fact that their families are domestic churches. The statement of Jesus in Matthew 18:20: “for where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst” becomes more applicable in this pandemic period and is meaningful for today's domestic church and the family. The present practice and spirit of praying together in Christian families should be taken with seriousness and sustained even after the current pandemic lockdown. We are meant to pray together in our different families and still go to church for a special togetherness and christian fellowship as commanded by God. One of the most exciting family rules is to dedicate some time to pray together and also for others. Our families should have times for family prayer and for sharing the word of God. When we pray together as a family, we become partners in building strong spiritual foundations for our home (I Corinthians 3: 9-11); a family that prays together stays together. Majority of families hitherto rarely prayed together nor do other activities together, but however, the social lockdown situations, banning external social interactions and religious gatherings have helped such families to be closer together than before. Efforts must be made to sustain the gains of the lockdown even after the pandemic.

Step 5: Questions and Answers: Allow the audience to ask some questions.

Step 6: TASK: Let the participants agree on a task that is practicable.

SUGGESTED TASK: Organize special family prayer sessions outside the regular ones and encourage Bible sharing in the neighborhood in small numbers and with face masks.

Step 7: Evaluation: The facilitator will ask some of the members to summarize the teaching of the day.

Step 8: Ask a member to conclude with a prayer.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR DATE: 19/07/2020

THEME FOR THE MONTH: SOCIAL LOCK DOWN: IMPLICATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Opening Prayer: Let the facilitator invite a member for the opening prayer.

INTRODUCTION: Let the facilitator revise the topic of last week with the audience briefly.

Step 1: Facilitator introduces the theme for the week: **CHALLENGES OF COVID-19: THE VALUE OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSE**

Step 2: Specific Biblical Passages are read: Galatians 6: 2, Matthew 25:35-40, Genesis 4:8-10, Colossians 3: 9-10

Step 3: Sharing: Members are allowed to share their experiences in relation to the readings heard.

Questions to Ponder:

1. How can we respond to the needs of the poor at this time?
2. What is our duty to those who are not able to come to Church at this time?

Step 4: Teaching: The facilitator will encourage the audience with these words: COVID 19 pandemic is introducing various changes into many areas of our world. Its impact is not just on economic, political and entertainment arena but also on our spirituality. The social dimension of the pandemic will be reflected as substantial societal consequences for a long time to come. We are already experiencing an increase in the number of unemployed people in a country where unemployment itself had always been a menace. Trying to respond to this particular problem on an individual basis, will only create more problems. This is the time we all are called to be our brothers' keepers. We begin this by being prudent in our spending and lifestyle. This is very important at this time because we live in an age where many people feel they don't have responsibility for the well-being of others. We live like Cain in our relationship with our brothers and sisters. The response of Cain to God in Genesis 4:9 when he was asked about his brother is the response of many of us to the challenges of those around us and our usual reactions to the needs of our neighbours often sound like: (a) "I do not know him, am I any brother's keeper?" (b) "I am to keep my own business to myself, and businesses of others are their own problems". (c) "I cannot be blamed for the misfortunes of others". (d) "At least, am not doing anything wrong for failing to help anybody in need". Clearly, these types of reaction to charity at this covid-19 period, is a re-echo of Cain's reactions to God about his brother Abel. Therefore, please, let us be our "brothers' keepers"! We are all called to stay in touch with those who cannot make it to church for whatever reason, and those who are in physical, social or spiritual needs. We are invited specially at this time to see and help Jesus in the poor while we ourselves can as well find Jesus in such charitable gestures. We are told in Matthew 25:35 that what God will use to judge us is how we respond to the needs of Jesus in the poor: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:35-40). And because you did these things to Jesus in the poor, on the last day you will be told by Jesus: "come, you are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world (Matthew 25: 34).

Step 5: Questions and Answers: Allow the audience to ask some questions.

Step 6: TASK: Let the participants agree on a task that is practicable

SUGGESTED TASK: Identify a neighbor in need and help, no matter how little and deliberately reduce spending on any items the family can do without even if needed.

Step 7: Evaluation: The facilitator will ask some of the members to summarize the teaching of the day.

Step 8: Ask a member to conclude with a prayer.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

DATE: 26/07/2020

THEME FOR THE MONTH: SOCIAL LOCK DOWN: IMPLICATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Opening Prayer: Let the facilitator invite a member for the opening prayer.

INTRODUCTION: Let the facilitator revise the topic of last week with the audience briefly.

Step 1: Facilitator introduces the theme for the week: **KINDS OF FEAR IN COVID-19 SOCIAL LOCKDOWN SITUATIONS**

Step 2: Specific Biblical Passages are read: Isa 59:1-2; Isa 1:18-20; Mt 6:25-34; Phil. 4:4-8.

Step 3: Sharing: Members are allowed to share their experiences in relation to the readings heard.

Questions to Ponder: 1. Can you add to the list of likely covid-19 fears from your own angle?

2. State other potential causes of fear during this pandemic! 3. What are your initial and present attitudes towards the pandemic and social lockdown?

Step 4: Teaching: The facilitator will encourage the audience with these words:

What is "fear"? Fear is any unpleasant feeling of possible danger, pain, frightening occurrence, threat, loss of vital things of life and any other feeling of being afraid.

1. Potential kinds of fear during the covid-19 pandemic

In the current pandemic, there are multitudes of potential fears that have confronted us as human beings and as children of God. We will only be able to list the following few examples of fears: becoming victim of covid-19 infection, loss of job or livelihood, serious lack of the basic needs such as money and food, other non-covid-19 sicknesses requiring hospitalization or purchase of drugs, loss of children education, sudden death of self or loved ones, loss of spirituality and faith, spiritual attacks, likely loss of properties, general vitality and healthy living, etc, etc.

2. The magnitude of fear

A serious pandemic such as the current covid-19 could be serious enough to affect every aspect of human life without exception. Space would limit us to write out a comprehensive number of examples of the physical, socio-economic, spiritual, psycho-social and health-related fears which **have been felt, or still** being felt (and potentially waiting to be felt) by the populace.

3. Some major causes of fear

For the children of God, the *being* responsible for the feeling of fear is the devil, using at will, his human messengers, using a variety of tricks, wiles, terrorism, attacks, etc. to achieve the devilish aims, namely:

(a) Sinfulness, accompanied by delayed or lack of the culture of repentance, confession, reconciliation and total conversion (Isa 59:1-2). The devil is the father and the harbinger of sins with the associated fears, through his satanic baits that often lead to sin and eventually feeling of insecurity, loss of self-confidence to face the devil, feeling of being removed from the divine quiver of God and from the palms of His hands (Isa 49:2, 16), feeling of various threats of covid-19 infection by unidentifiable contacts, as well as anxiety on possible sudden, unforeseen family calamities, etc.

(b) Laziness in standing-up to ordinary or common life challenges, even in obeying hand-washing and other medical advisories against covid-19 spread; stupid non-belief in the existence of the pandemic, etc.

(c) Lack of spiritual bank to lean-on in times like this, and unwillingness to make up and compensate for the lost or weak spirituality

(d) Risky attitudes towards "whatever you feel or do, what will happen, will happen". The lack of faith in trusting and ensuring absolute dependency on God, whose saving power can change the impossible circumstances (Jer. 32:27).

4. Assurances of God's children. We need not fear after-all as children of God, for yet, we are blessed by the ever-presence of the Saviour (Obad. 21, Mark 4:39) in all our unpleasant circumstances: where else should we go when HE has the message of eternal salvation (Jn. 6:68). Also, Rom 8:28 tells us that all things work-out together (end-up) for good for those that love HIM and are called for His purpose; and if God is for us, who or what or how can covid-19 be against us (Rom. 8:31); having assured us that we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37)! Fear not, be not afraid or dismayed (Isa 41:10) because we are more precious than sparrows; do not fear the body-killer but the killer of both the body and the soul; no cubit can be added to our heights by being afraid (Matt. 6:27); fear is the tool of satan who may use it to steal, kill and destroy but Christ who has overcome the enemy for us (Jn.16:33), gives abundant life of peace that surpasses all understanding to His elect (Jn. 10:10); unpleasant challenges to the elect often represent persecution by the adversary, the devil, who also persecuted HIM.

5. What you need to do as a child of God; in whatever circumstances you find yourself, be calm, do your best to always "do things right" (in righteousness) like Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12), be in the Word daily, maintaining your family-altar and your status as an elect of Christ; be strong in faith, courage and action (Deut 31: 6-8); look up to Him in the storm, not at the storm (Mark 4:39); be optimistic and positive in hope, for the weeping lasts the night, then

joy comes in the morning: this pandemic is on its way-out of Nigeria and from every nation of the world, sooner than any human imagination (Phil. 4:6-8). AMEN

Step 5: Questions and Answers: Allow the audience to ask some questions.

Step 6: TASK: Let the participants agree on a task that is practicable.

SUGGESTED TASK: Study, meditate and pray on the selected biblical assurances against fears and expect to use them in evangelizing

Step 7: Evaluation: The facilitator will ask some of the members to summarize the teaching of the day.

Step 8: Ask a member to conclude with prayer.