



ARCHDIOCESE OF KOTA KINABALU

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To all clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese

PASTORAL LETTER

“Save us Lord, we are going down!” and He said to them, “Why are you so frightened, you men of little faith?” (Mt. 8:25-26)

In the evening of March 27, 2020 Pope Francis walked alone in the empty St. Peter’s square in the glistering rain towards a covered platform where he read and reflected the passage on the “Calming of the storm”, inviting the Church and the world to hold on to Jesus Christ in the midst of the pandemic that has inflicted the entire world.

Today after 100 days since that event, the number of daily active Covid19 cases in Malaysia has sharply reduced. Indeed, God has been merciful to us in spite of our little faith. To Him be praised and glory! Let us continue to cling to Him as we sail through the pandemic storm.

We are now at the recovery phase of the lockdown. The Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) is expected to last until 31st August 2020. As a move to gradually return to normal, our Government has allowed more economic and social activities to be resumed in the country, one of which is the reopening of the places of worship for public.

The Federal Ministry of National Unity and the Sabah Ministry of Law and Native Affairs have been entrusted to oversee the resumption of non-Islamic religious services. Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) have been issued for the compliance of the churches and temples.

After consulting all quarters, I am pleased to announce that churches in all parishes in the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu will be resuming public Masses on the weekend of 11th and 12th July 2020. I believe many of you are longing and looking forward to receive the Eucharistic Lord.

It has been a long 15 weeks of deprivation, not only in the reception of the sacrament but more so to experience Church as communion. As abiding citizens, we have complied with the MCO because of our faith in God and for the common good of all.

Though the pandemic is not yet over, our wait to freely attend Mass will be shortened if everyone adheres strictly to the protocol. I say “freely” because, to comply with social distancing, we are only allowed to fill one third of the capacity of the church. That means not all church goers can go to Mass as and when they like.

To ensure that everyone will have a chance to attend Mass, there will be some forms of regulation by the parishes. I hope you understand why the need for such protocol. Meanwhile, those who are waiting for their turn to attend Mass can still access to live streaming Masses.

The new normal for Mass attendance would cause some inconveniences in terms of our interaction and movement. It would require extra sacrifices, patience, generosity and charity on our part. This is a time when we are called to live our faith in action, to go the “extra mile” for the good of our fellow parishioners.

On the other hand, aside from adapting to the new normal, it would be good to prepare ourselves to look beyond the recovery phase. The pandemic has brought about both negative and positive impacts to the world at large. Fear, affliction and death are experienced in many regions. Economic and social uncertainties, emotional stress, loss of employment, poverty and so forth are becoming daily challenges and burdens to many families.

To go beyond the recovery stage, policy responses of national governments are crucial. However, as believers, what would be our faith response to the negative impacts? What can we do individually and as faith communities to reach out to those who cry out “Save us, we are going down!”?

On a positive note, the worldwide lockdown has been a blessing to the environment and climate. There were reports of a large drop in air pollution due to decline in air travels, lesser road traffics, shutdown of factories and so forth. Though such impacts are short-term, but any slowdown in the degradation of environment is definitely a contribution to a better tomorrow.

However, as lockdown easing, we find a world that is eager to rush back to the pre-pandemic era to make up for the lost time. How can we promote and advocate for a serious reading and adoption of the encyclical letter of Pope Francis, “Laudato Si”? What can we do individually and as parish communities to protect nature and promote sustainable development that is eco-friendly?

Indeed, the basic question is: What have we learnt from the lockdown? What is the Lord saying to the world today?

I leave these thoughts to you as we reopen our churches. The new normal should not stop at adhering merely to the protocol and SOP, it should challenge us to remove the abnormalities in our pre-pandemic life to what is desirable to our calling as the children of God and stewards of the earth.

May the Spirit give us the courage to do the will of the Father.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Wong', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the left.

Archbishop John Wong

5 July 2020