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To: Clergy, Religious and Laity of the Archdiocese of New Orleans

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Easter 2020 will have its own unique chapter in history. Throughout Holy Week and Easter Sunday we usually gather in our churches to celebrate the Solemn Liturgies. This year is indeed different as we endure the coronavirus and are called to small group gatherings and to social distancing.

Though we cannot gather in our churches, we are called to enter into prayer and walk with Jesus in his suffering, death and resurrection. These days call us to spend additional time in prayer. Choose a Gospel account and reflect on Jesus' journey to Calvary and the tomb. In the midst of that prayer we also hear Jesus say, "If you wish to be my disciple, take up your cross and follow me." Matt. 16:24

I have heard some ask, "Is this coronavirus God's punishment on the world?" No, the God who loves us is not a God of revenge or condemnation, but a God who calls us to be converted to his love and mercy. God allows tragedies to call us to a greater dependence on him as the God of our lives and promises that out of this darkness he will bring hope and new life.

Many in our community are suffering physically and emotionally. We ask God's healing for the ill and eternal rest for those who have died from the virus. There is anxiety as we wonder about the future, our employment, finances, school, basic security and care for our families. In the midst of all these questions, Jesus says, "It is I, ... do not be afraid ... peace be with you", as he said to the disciples after his resurrection. We must open our hearts and see him, standing outside the tomb offering to bring light into our darkness.

Please remember health care professionals and all who serve us at this time. May our church bells ringing at 6:00 p.m. daily be a sign of our prayer for those who risk their lives for us. A special word of thanks to our clergy who have provided opportunities for us to grow spiritually.

To more than 300 people who were to enter the Church at Easter, through Baptism or Profession of Faith, we eagerly look forward to welcoming you into our family of faith in the near future.

May the peace of the Risen Christ bring light into any darkness you experience and hope in this time of uncertainty.

Wishing you the blessings of the Risen Christ and a remembrance at Easter Mass, I am

Faithfully in Christ,

Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond
Archbishop of New Orleans

GMA/mk