



A Message from Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R. Archbishop of Newark April 1, 2020

Spiritual Closeness in a Time of Social Distancing: Seven Suggestions

As Christians, we encounter Jesus in his people—our families and friends, our neighbors and fellow parishioners, our co-workers and school mates, even people we don't know personally (strangers) who we come in contact with as we go about our daily lives. Jesus tells us that we find him in the “least of these” brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25: 31-46), so being close to them means being close to him.

During this unprecedented time of pandemic, we need to be especially concerned about those who are experiencing intense anxiety, feel lonely and abandoned, and who really count on public worship for their own support. We also should be concerned about how the spiritual lives of our people will be impacted by the drastic changes we are all experiencing for the first time in our lives. The Eucharist and the celebration of the Mass are so central to our Church that their absence is really felt deeply by us.



“Social distancing” is necessary for the common good, but we need to counter this with a dramatic increase in what Pope Francis calls “spiritual closeness.” How can we stay close to Jesus, and all our sisters and brothers, at a time when concern for them demands that we keep our distance? How can we remain spiritually close at the same time that we practice social distancing?

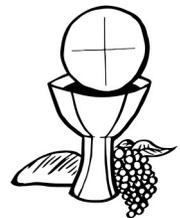
Here are some simple suggestions for staying close spiritually while maintaining a safe and respectful social distance:

1. Begin each day with prayer. Ask Jesus to stay close to you and to all your family and friends. Pray for the health and well-being of everyone you associate with, and of all God's people throughout the world.
2. Express your love and concern for the people you live with—your spouse, children, other relatives or friends. Comfort and encourage them when they are frightened and feeling closed-in or helpless.

3. Reach out to other family members, friends and colleagues by telephone, texting, email and other forms of social media. Let them know that you are close to them and that you share their experiences and anxiety.
4. Attend Mass and other prayers and devotions virtually. Many opportunities are available each day on television, radio and online. Participation in the life of the Church can help us feel more closely connected with God and with each other. Make a spiritual communion (see below).
5. As you go about your daily business—working remotely, studying at home, doing spring cleaning, caring for children or family members, preparing dinner, doing the laundry, and more—look for opportunities to offer up your activities to God in gratitude for his closeness to you.
6. To the extent that you can, share your financial resources with those in need. Online giving is available for most religious, educational and charitable organizations, but if that's not an option for you, you can write a check and mail it, or set aside some cash to give to someone in need once the current stay at home order has been lifted.
7. Be patient with yourself and those you love. This is a strange and difficult time for all of us. Frustration and anger are understandable reactions. We need to help each other remain calm and trust in the healing power of Jesus who is close to us—now and always.

Prayer for Spiritual Communion

Dear Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive your Body and Blood. Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. Stay close to me, Jesus, so that I may be close to all our sisters and brothers, especially those who are most in need of your loving care. Amen.



Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,

+ Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

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