

# **U.S. bishops deliver Easter messages of hope to online congregations**

WASHINGTON (CNS) – On Easter Sunday, a day when churches are typically full and congregations are more dressed up than usual, bishops and priests around the country celebrated Masses in empty cathedrals and churches looking out to rows of vacant pews and a phone or camera recording the Mass.

In keeping with federal and local guidelines restricting public gatherings, Catholics, like members of other faiths, stayed home on Easter, as they have for other recent Sundays, and turned on their computers to join April 12 Masses livestreamed by their parish or diocese.

Many homilies reflected the current moment of physical suffering and the sadness of forced isolation while acknowledging the significance of coming together, even remotely, on this important day in the church's liturgical year.

But above all, church leaders emphasized the Easter message of new life, stressing that believers' hope in the resurrection is crucial during this time of pandemic, that finding life after death or times of darkness and struggle was part of the church's very essence.

Prayers of the faithful during these livestreamed Masses also sought healing for those sickened by COVID-19 and protection for essential workers and those in the health profession. These health care workers were remembered the over with thank-you messages projected onto Brazil's famous Christ the Redeemer statue.

Small churches and big cathedrals alike also tolled church

bells on Easter Sunday as a sign of prayerfulness and solidarity.

In urging parishes in his Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, to take part in the bell tolling, Bishop David L. Ricken said he hoped the sound would be a “clarion call to hope.”

“We hear the Easter bells as a call to solidarity among all the members of our community so that in the face of the pandemic, we might respond to witness to the power of the Resurrection, the power of love that is stronger than death and faith in a provident God who can always bring good out of evil,” said Boston Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley in his Easter Mass homily at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston.

“To know the risen Lord, is to know his love, and his invitation to lead a better life, to treat each other with greater respect and concern,” the cardinal said, adding that this means “our lives must change.”

“We must move beyond the materialism and individualism of our culture and embrace our mission to witness to the good news and make God’s kingdom more visible by the way that we love, forgive, care for each other and serve one another especially those who are sick and suffering. The Resurrection assures us that there is life beyond the cross, there is meaning to suffering, that love is stronger than death.”

In his Easter homily at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, who is president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said this was an “extraordinary Easter, as Christians in almost every nation are forced to celebrate in their homes because our world is shut down by the coronavirus.”

But like other church leaders, the archbishop focused on “the glorious promise of the resurrection that we celebrate today.”

As he put it to livestream congregation: “God does not

withdraw his promise, even when the shadow of death seems to hang over the world, even when Easter comes during an epidemic.”

“Easter tells us that we don’t have to be afraid of death; we don’t have to be afraid of suffering,” he said, adding that even in these difficult times God knows our needs and will “bring us out of this pandemic.”

In opening remarks at the beginning of Easter Mass celebrated at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Washington pointed out the Mass was being viewed by people in many different places, adding: “We are united in faith.”

The livestreamed Mass had more than 3,600 viewers from throughout the archdiocese along with people from other states and countries.

Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, who celebrated Easter Mass at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore, urged the faithful to be “infected” with the risen life of Jesus.

In his homily, he said the coronavirus is a reminder that for all of our progress and technology, we are not invincible. He said the pandemic is a “wake-up call” and urged Catholics not to pray for its end just to “go back to business as usual.”

As we pray for the pandemic’s end, he said, we must also pray that the contagion of hope in Jesus and his resurrection will spread “from person to person, from home to home, and from parish to parish, looking to that day when we will be together again to celebrate the sacraments in joy and newness of life.”

After the Sunday Mass, the archbishop went to Sacred Heart Parish in Glyndon, Maryland, to assist the parish with the distribution of boxes of food to those who are experiencing food insecurity because of the pandemic. Father Gerard Francik, pastor of Sacred Heart and St. Charles Borromeo in

Pikesville, Maryland, estimated that 1,000 families would be served that afternoon.

As Bishop Richard F. Stika of Knoxville, Tennessee, celebrated Easter Mass at the Cathedral of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, it likewise was livestreamed to the faithful. Afterward, standing outside at the foot of the steps of the cathedral, Bishop Stika held the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament and blessed the people of Knoxville. He blessed residents to the north, south, east and west by making the sign of the cross in each direction.

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