

---

## **COVID-19 Coronavirus: Bulgaria, state of emergency, deserted streets in Sofia. Mutaftcijski (Crisis Unit), “we follow Italian rules”. Catholic and Orthodox celebrations online**

(Sofia) The streets of Sofia and of Bulgaria's major cities are now deserted after the Bulgarian Parliament unanimously declared the state of emergency on 13 March. Schools, shops and restaurants are closed; only grocery stores, pharmacies and banks will remain open. The last flights to Rome are scheduled for today, and there is high alert at the borders for the mass return of Bulgarians from abroad. Sofia has so far confirmed 52 cases and 2 deaths from COVID-19, but the Crisis Unit is bracing for a surge in infections. Indeed, everyone is invited to stay home. “We are following the painful experience of Italy and its measures”, said Colonel Mutaftcijski, the head of the Crisis Unit, who addressed a heartfelt message to Bulgarians, urging them to abide by the rules and stay home for “the lives of our elders are at stake, and many of them will die”. Masses are also suspended in all Catholic Churches of the Diocese of Sofia-Plovdiv at the directive of Bishop Georgi Yovcev. Almost all parishes have started to stream their Masses. “It is a painful decision for me - Rev. Jaroslav Babik, pastor at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Sofia, told SIR news agency -, but we must comply with the government's rules and avoid gatherings”. His appeal to the Catholic community is to “pray assiduously at home and avoid contacts with other people”. Also, a 24-hour Rosary Prayer initiative has been launched on social media for all COVID-19 patients. Even the Orthodox are live streaming their Divine Liturgies from the Patriarchal Cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky, where the faithful are invited to keep a distance of 1.5 metres between each other.

Valentina Bombelli