
Coronavirus Covid-19: the French Bishops' "regret", "freedom of religion is the key to a democratic life"



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The Permanent Council of the Bishops' Conference of France, on behalf of all Bishops, "regretfully" acknowledges the date of 2nd June "imposed on Catholics and on all the religions of our country" as the date when the celebrations with gatherings of people can be resumed. It is a very harsh notice, the one issued by the Bishops' Conference of France just after the announcement of the roadmap to get out of the strict confinement against Coronavirus made by the French Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, to the National Assembly yesterday afternoon. According to the Government's directives, places of worship can stay open as they are now, and funerals can be celebrated in churches and cemeteries, but with no more than 20 people around. But this is not enough for the French Catholic Bishops. "We share the Government's care in trying to curb the spreading of the epidemic as much as possible, but it is difficult to understand how the ordinary practice of Mass can help spread the virus and interfere with safe distances more than many of the activities that will soon be reopened. The spiritual and religious dimension of the human being – the Bishops write – improves, we are sure, peace of the heart, strength in trial, fraternity among people and the whole of social life. Freedom of religion is key to a democratic life. This is the reason why the Bishops wish to meet the national and local public authorities, to get ready for the actual resumption of worship". The notice reassures that: "Catholics did and will follow the Government's instructions". The Permanent Council of the Bishops' Conference of France "warmly encourages the families affected by death to not give up on religious funerals, even if not all the members of their family can be gathered together". There is also an invitation to the devotees to "go to church to pray alone" and to the dioceses and parishes to look after the Catholics' life of faith. The French Bishops therefore look to Sunday 31st May as the date the Church celebrates Pentecost. And they wish: "Unless the epidemic starts again, it should mark the end of the strict confinement in liturgical and sacramental life. The

[Permanent Council of the Bishops' Conference of France calls the Catholics to live the month of May as a month 'in the Cenacle', praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit and as a Marian month".](#)

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