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To: The Faithful of the Diocese of London

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Lenten journey now inevitably comes to its intended destination, Holy Week and the celebration of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Because of the coronavirus, it has taken on an unexpected form, so too our marking of these high holy days of the Church's year. Instead of gathering in our parish churches to remember and relive these foundational events in our lives as believers and disciples, we will shelter in our homes in service of the greater good of the larger community. Yet in doing so, we imitate the Lord who called us to lay down our lives in love for others, as he himself did, if only in giving up our expectations and preferences.

In some mysterious way, our celebration of Holy Week this year will have unique features that will join us with the passion and death of the Lord in a very tangible way. At present, we find ourselves in the valley of darkness with the shadow of death ever present. So it was for Jesus in his last days. Most particularly we are now living in isolation, apart from others, virtually alone in these moments of uncertainty and fear. In so many ways our circumstances mirror those of Jesus himself, who in living the agony of his passion and death was alone, in isolation. He was alone in the garden, wrestling with his fears as he anticipated what was about to happen. He was alone in his inquisition before the chief priests and elders, with no one at his side to support or to speak for him. He was alone before the crowds who screamed for his death. He was alone as he bore the weight of the cross along the route that led to Calvary. And he was alone on the cross as he faced the final human experience of death.

Throughout his isolation, Jesus never resisted or protested or cried out in the face of the terrible pain of being alone, for he understood, in the very core of himself, that even in these things he was not, in fact, alone, that God his Father was intimately close, sharing his grief and sorrow.

In these distressing and angst-fraught days that are currently ours, we, likewise, are not alone. God, who came to share in the totality of our human situation, in its joys and sorrows, its hopes and disappointments, its blessings and pains, walks with us, beside us, through it all. Even now, our God shares with us the confusion, the uncertainty and the struggle of these times in which we are living.

And so, although in isolation, we will be with Jesus and he with us as he bends down to wash the feet of his disciples and commands us to do likewise "in remembrance of me". We will be with Jesus as he suffers and dies not only for but also with us. And we will be with Jesus as he commends himself into the hands of his Father.

In the Gospel of John, as Jesus turns to go to Bethany to raise his friend Lazarus, the evangelist records the apostle Thomas saying: "Let us go that we may also die with him" (11:16). Now from our homes, residences and sick rooms let us go to die with him, for in doing so we will share in the life Jesus brings in confronting darkness, evil and death. In our isolation, we can discover inexplicably but truthfully the power of the resurrection.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London