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A chalice is seen at a Catholic church in Bangkok Nov. 12, 2019, ahead of Pope Francis' visit. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments has approved a special "Mass in the Time of Pandemic" during the COVID-19 crisis. (CNS/Reuters/Soe Zeya Tun)

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The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments has approved a special "Mass in the Time of Pandemic" to plead for God's mercy and gift of strength in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Mass opens with a prayer that God would "look with compassion on the afflicted, grant eternal rest to the dead, comfort to mourners, healing to the sick, peace to the dying, strength to health care workers, wisdom to our leaders and the courage to reach out to all in love."

In a letter dated March 30, Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the congregation, and Archbishop Arthur Roche, congregation secretary, said, "In these days, during which the whole world has been gravely stricken by the COVID-19 virus," many bishops and priests have asked "to be able to celebrate a specific Mass to implore God to bring an end to this pandemic."

The congregation granted the request and provided special prayers and suggestions for the Scripture readings to be used.

The "Mass in the Time of Pandemic," the congregation said, can be celebrated on any day "except solemnities; the Sundays of Advent, Lent and Easter (season); days within the Octave of Easter; the commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day); Ash Wednesday; and the days of Holy Week."

The offertory prayer for the Mass reads: "Accept, O Lord, the gifts we offer in this time of peril. May they become for us, by your power, a source of healing and peace. Through Christ our Lord."

One of the suggested Gospel readings is Mark 4:35-41, the story of the disciples in the boat on the stormy Sea of Galilee; it is the same reading Pope Francis used March 27 for his special prayer service and blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world), begging God to end the pandemic.

One of the optional first readings is Lamentations 3:17-26, which includes the lines: "I will call this to mind, as my reason to have hope: The favors of the Lord are not exhausted, his mercies are not spent; they are renewed each morning, so great is his faithfulness. My portion is the Lord, says my soul, therefore will I hope in him."

A passage from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans also could be used, proclaiming: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?"

The new Mass ends with the "prayer over the people," which says: "O God, protector of all who hope in you, bless your people, keep them safe, defend them, prepare them, that, free from sin and safe from the enemy, they may persevere always in your love. Through Christ our Lord."

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