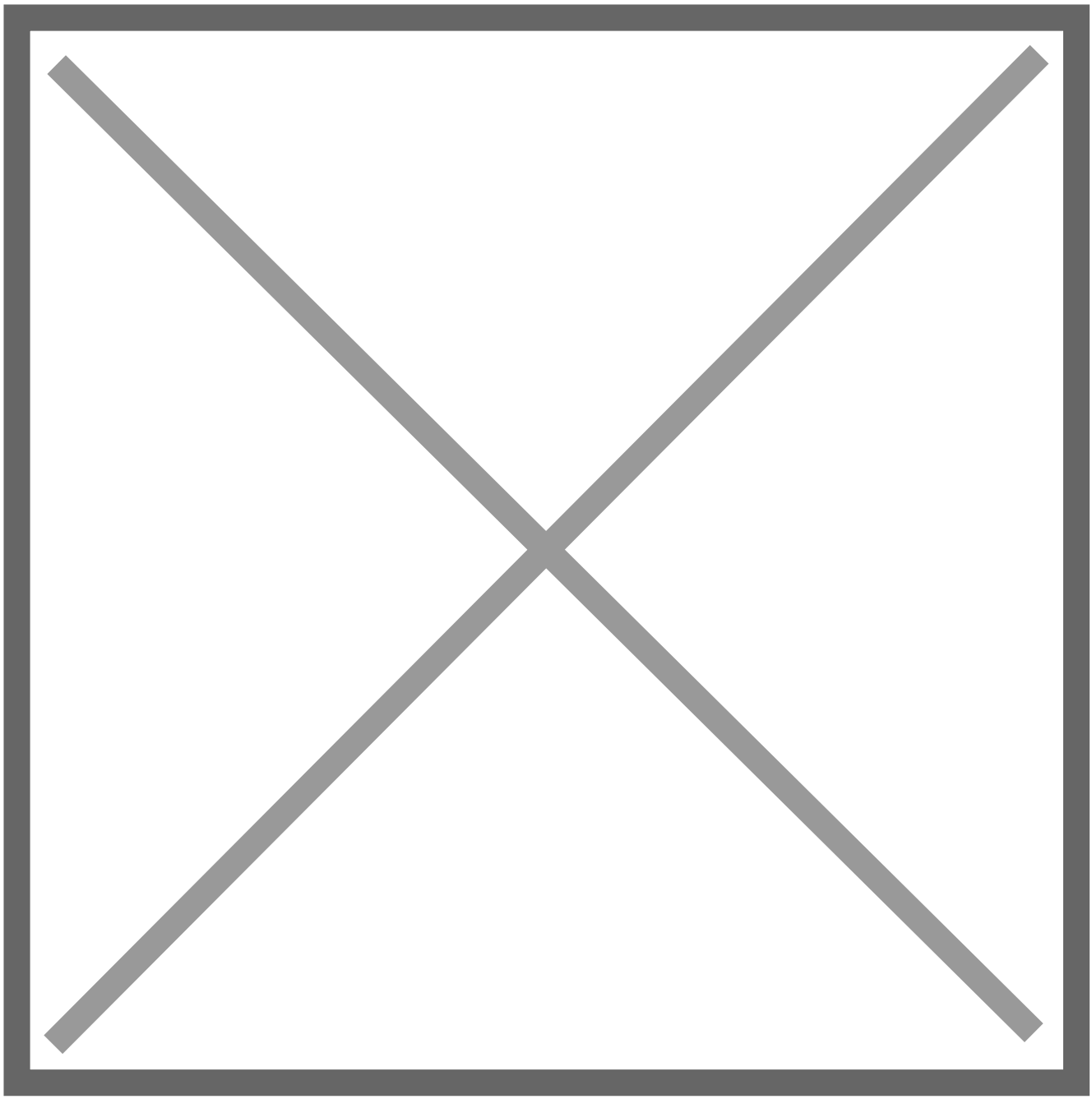
News



A priest celebrates Mass Dec. 25, 2019, at St. George Chaldean Church in Baghdad. In a decree issued Dec. 16, the Congregation for Divine Worship stated that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, priests are allowed to celebrate up to four Masses on Christmas Day, as well as the Jan. 1 feast of Mary, Mother of God, and the Jan. 6 feast of the Epiphany. (CNS/Reuters/Khalid al Mousily)

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The Vatican decreed that priests can celebrate as many as four Masses on several important feast days, including Christmas, to accommodate the participation of the faithful.

In a decree published in Latin Dec. 16, Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, said the decision was made "in view of the situation brought about by the worldwide spread of the pandemic."

Due to the "persistence of the general contagion of the so-called COVID-19 virus, we willingly grant to the local ordinary permission to celebrate four Masses on Christmas Day (Dec. 25); the feast of Mary, Mother of God (Jan. 1) and the feast of the Epiphany (Jan. 6)," Sarah wrote.

The concession, he wrote, can be given by bishops whenever deemed "necessary for the benefit of the faithful."

According to the Code of Canon Law, while a priest "may not celebrate (Mass) more than once a day," a bishop may "for a good reason allow priests to celebrate twice in one day or even, if pastoral need requires it, three times on Sundays or holy days of obligation."

The decree would allow for more Catholics to be able to participate at Mass, especially in churches with limited seating due to social distancing measures.

In Italy, new restrictions enacted to slow the spread of the coronavirus have prompted the Catholic Church to find different ways to celebrate Mass during the Christmas season while observing current regulations.

The Vatican announced Dec. 10 that Pope Francis will celebrate the Christmas "Mass during the Night" Dec. 24 at 7:30 p.m. local time so that the few people invited to attend can get home in time to observe Italy's 10 p.m. curfew.

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