**Homily – St. Muredach’s Cathedral – Sunday, March 15th, 2020**

'Solidarity, not selfishness' is a headline in one of today's newspapers. It sums up what we need to do as a society and as a Christian community in the face of the pandemic which is now in our midst. Solidarity in normal circumstances means coming together; in the circumstances we now face it means staying apart in order to contain this virus. The Government and the HSE have issued clear guidelines on how we might effect this solidarity as citizens. For a few moments let me reflect on how this might express itself in terms of our faith community.

The Eucharist is the centre and source of our lives as a Christian community. To help protect life, the bishops have decided to suspend the celebration of Mass in all our churches until and including March 29th, when the situation will be reviewed. For the coming two weeks, access to Mass, however, is available by spiritual communion through radio, TV and webcam. This is an opportunity for us not only to join our local community in prayer but to become part of the worldwide community at prayer in this very difficult time.
At present, all churches in this country are still open so that people can visit the church and pray in silence before the Blessed Sacrament. While people must sit at least six feet apart, the opportunity is still available to us to pray in God's presence , to allow the Lord speak to us in that silence and, with God's help, possibly to rediscover a new awareness of His presence in our lives.

Station masses and house masses are also suspended until further notice.
The Government has limited indoor gatherings to 100 people. This decision must be respected by everyone. As a result, for the next two weeks it is possible to attend the celebration of baptisms, weddings and funerals. However, in this diocese, the responsibility for ensuring that the number at any of these ceremonies does not exceed 100 lies with a named member of the family who wishes to have a baptism, a wedding or a funeral. Therefore, before a commitment is given by any priest to hold any one of these ceremonies, this person must assure the priest that the number attending will not exceed 100, in accordance with Government guidelines.

I am aware that, in particular, this decision of the Government will touch, in a very sensitive manner, the lives of those who have had the death of a family member. Ireland has a wonderful tradition of supporting the families of those who are bereaved by their presence at funerals. However, in this exceptional time, support for the family and for society must express itself in not attending a funeral Mass, rather than feeling that you should be there. No family, in their hour of deep grief, should be expected to have to turn people away from a funeral Mass. Therefore, only the immediate family should attend a family funeral at this time. You can support the family by respecting their need for privacy and by your prayers, by a text message or perhaps, a phone call.

Together, as a faith community and as a society, we can face this unforeseen and unprecedented crisis by looking out for one another, by observing the guidelines issued by Church and State and by not putting the lives of any one in danger.

In particular, let us offer the support of our prayers to those who will contract the virus, to their families, to the medical staff that will care for them and the priests who will minister to their spiritual needs. Let us also remember with gratitude, all those who will help keep our society going at this time.

And let us have hope; hope that while much may change as a result of this pandemic, in the end, with God's help, all will be well. May the Lord deliver us from all harm.

St Patrick, St Brigid and St Muredach, pray for us.