



## **COVID-19: Social Media and Catholic Worship -Malachy Wache**

Apr 28, 2020

---

### **ADAMAWA, NIGERIA -**

As a communication medium, Social media is relatively a new technology which emerged about a decade ago. Despite its seeming novelty, this form of digital engagement has revolutionized the way we interact, engage in relationships, learn and generate and share knowledge. It is in this age of social media that Coronavirus disease also known as COVID-19 broke out becoming a global concern. Sadly, it is spreading at an alarming rate. Little did we know that what started in far away Wuhan, China on 31st December 2019 will eventually reach our doorsteps causing anxiety and distress. Truth is, the virus is real and it is out of the ordinary!

Despite all misgivings, social media is a huge resource for fighting Coronavirus disease. This is because most of the information on the outbreak keeps circulating to the ordinary person on the street. Notwithstanding this extraordinary epidemic, social isolation and lockdown, people still desire to be closer to their God. Thankfully, the sacrifice of the Holy Mass is now streamed live just as prayers and benediction are telecasted on various social media platforms. While some conservatives think that the use of social media is not good and should be discouraged, liberals, in fact, relish employing these media for religious activities in the comfort of their homes.

It was amidst this quagmire that Pope Francis said, "Faith through media consumption is not the church" while celebrating Holy Mass at a Chapel in the Vatican on April 17, 2020. The Pontiff maintained that the use of social

media and spiritual communion do not represent the Church. While acknowledging that the Church has found herself in a difficult moment, he emphasized that the ideal Church is always with the people and the sacraments.

As such, that Christians particularly Catholics cannot come together as a community to celebrate the sacrifice of the Lord or receive the sacraments because of government's restrictions against people gathering in a group as part of efforts to halt the spread of the Coronavirus, is a serious matter. To this, the Holy Father stressed that "One's relationship with Jesus is intimate, it is personal but it is always effective in a community." As such "the Church, the sacrament and the people of God are concrete. The sacraments without the community is dangerous" said he. The Bishop of Rome further noted that the apostles had a concrete relationship with God – As a community, they lived with the people of God; they did not live selfishly as individuals or lived in a viral way that is spread only online.

Questions that readily come to mind include: Does following prayers online truly make us Church, a family of God? How should we worship God during pandemics like Coronavirus? To attempt answers to these questions, it is crucial to remember that Jesus tells us to shut the door or enter into our inner rooms when praying. This means that when we go into the depths of our hearts and pray, our heavenly father can hear and grant our deepest heart desires.

No doubt, God hears and answers prayers in the depths of our hearts (Cf. Matt.5:6-7). Those great men and women in scripture put the word of God in their hearts and worked on it. The word became fruitful in their lives. We need to realize that the Church is not the structure; we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. As such, we can pray in the inner room of our hearts and God who sees everything that is done in secret will reward us.

For Catholics, this is a period to revive and sustain Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and offering prayers at homes. The SCCs consist of a group of individual Christians who, at the level of family, come together for prayers. It is made up of a small group of 8 – 12 persons who come together at designated homes for daily or weekly prayers. Life in SCCs is simply living out our baptismal brotherhood and sisterhood practically with few people. On the matter, Sr. Prof. Theresa Okure disclosed that: "The current situation where we feel deprived of Church to worship reminds

us that most of Jesus' memorable teachings in the gospels took place in private homes for instance: Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Simon the Pharisee and the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7:36-50)." Her words are a recipe for COVID-19 lockdown.

Within this period, the emphasis is on rediscovering the root of our faith – After the resurrection, the apostles were steadfast to praying, teaching and breaking of bread in homes. They gathered in households and had everything in common – the community that started at home was able to expand the kingdom of God. The beauty of a family praying together cannot be compared with any other secular gatherings. The home is a Domestic Church, the primary Church.

Although social media was originally created for social networking and generating personal profiles, it is can nonetheless be used as a tool for communication and expanding the kingdom of God on virtual space. We need to explore its usability during epidemics like this one. However, we must remember that this cannot replace our authentic and real communal worship as a Church. Perhaps this global pandemic has allowed families to stay together and observe their Sunday worship and prayers.

Parents/guardians must assume their God-given responsibilities to lead the family to God on the home-front. Like the early apostles, with or without Online Worship, each family should meet together for worship and prayer. As we look forward to when we will reconvene as the Body of Christ, may the Holy Spirit assist us to take full responsibility of our lives in a way that not even the absence of regular meetings or social media can separate us from the love of God made perfect in Christ Jesus.

*Fr. Malachy Wache is a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Yola currently a Masters Student specializing in Pastoral Communication at the Centre for the Study of African Culture and Communication (CESACC), Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. E-mail: tumbre23@yahoo.com, +2348062245778*

