

What can Catholics do to protect their mental health during the Coronavirus?

This document provides some advice and suggestions for how Catholics can protect their mental health during the challenging time we face due to Coronavirus. We also list helplines and resources at the bottom of the document so that you are able to receive further information or advice.

➤ **Mental health and your spiritual life**

A healthy and nourished spiritual life is central to mental health and wellbeing. For Catholics, attending Mass on Sundays and during the week is a source of mental and spiritual strength, as well as a social and community activity. This section will briefly explore some ways in which we can keep up a healthy spiritual life during times of social distancing and isolation.

Public Masses were suspended in England and Wales from Friday 20 March until further notice. This will be a cause of distress and disruption to Catholics, but we are lucky to live in a time when technology can be a great help for the development of our spiritual lives.

The Catholic Truth Society has put together a helpful list of suggestions for several ways in which you can nourish your mental health and spiritual life during this time. You can find the full list and more information [here](#), but here are a few key points:

- **Make a Spiritual Communion**
Spiritual Communion is the heartfelt desire to receive Our Lord, even when we are unable because of the distance or for some other reason.
- **Watch Mass**
Many dioceses are providing information about livestreamed Masses in parishes. You may also like to visit the website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for more information on parishes live-streaming Mass online: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/>.
- **Read the Mass readings of the day**
When you can't attend Mass, you can follow the prayers and readings of the Mass at home.

- Meditate on the Mass readings
Spend time meditating on the Mass readings and discerning what God might be telling you through them, using Lectio Divina, an ancient method of prayer. There is a guide for how to do this on www.IgnatianSpirituality.com.
- Watch a video of a priest preaching on the day's Gospel
New ministries are coming to light during this uncertain time, and one of those is [Lent in Isolation](#), where you can listen to the day's Mass readings and hear a priest give a homily.
- Join an online community praying together daily
It is more important than ever to join together in prayer and utilise technology to form communities so that no one is isolated. The CTS will be posting prayers every day on [Hozana](#).

As Catholics, we know the importance of going to Sunday Mass which is why the Church tells us that not going is a grave sin. However, this does not include those who are physically unable to get to Mass through no fault of their own. This means if you are unwell, in self-isolation, or for some other reason you cannot get to Mass, you are not committing a sin because in those instances you are not required to attend Mass.

➤ **Coping with OCD during Coronavirus**

Coronavirus will present a unique challenge to those who live with OCD, especially in the form of scrupulosity (a form of OCD involving religious or moral obsessions). Indeed, the charity OCD Action has reported an increase in support requests from people whose fears have become focused on the coronavirus pandemic.

For people with OCD and some types of anxiety, being constantly told to wash your hands can be especially difficult to hear. It could also be difficult to identify which behaviours are 'acceptable' and recommended, and which are driven by the OCD and anxiety. OCD Action has published some helpful guidelines about how to manage your OCD during this time. The full list and more information can be found [here](#).

Scrupulosity is something which Catholic living with OCD might struggle with during the coronavirus pandemic. Scrupulous individuals are overly concerned

that something they thought or did might be a sin or other violation of religious or moral doctrine. In particular, not being able to attend Mass might be a cause of concern and worry for Catholics with OCD. As we stated earlier, it is important to remember that you are **not** committing a sin by not attending Mass during the pandemic. There are many ways in which you can maintain a healthy spiritual life, listed above.

For more information on scrupulosity and how it may be treated, please see [this factsheet](#) from the International OCD Foundation. Reading this alongside OCD Action's guidelines on Coronavirus might be helpful if you are a Catholic struggling with your OCD during this time.

➤ **News and Social Media**

At times like this it is of course important to keep up to date with health information and advice; however, rolling news is not always helpful, and can contribute to mental ill health, including feelings of anxiety and depression. Here are some pointers for how to look after your mental health while keeping up to date with the news:

- Limit the amount of time you spend reading or watching things which aren't making you feel better. Perhaps decide on a specific time to check in with the news;
- Stay informed by sticking to trusted sources of information such as government and NHS websites, and updates from the World Health Organisation (WHO);
- Take some time away from news websites and social media if you are feeling anxious;
- Mute key words which might be triggering on Twitter and unfollow or mute accounts
- Mute WhatsApp groups and hide Facebook and other social media posts and feeds if you find them overwhelming;
- Talk to someone if you feel that you can't manage your anxiety alone. Support helplines are listed below.
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➤ **Support and Helplines**

An extensive list of mental health support and helplines can be found on the Helplines page of the Catholic Mental Health Project website, by clicking [here](#).

Organisations mentioned in this document:

Anxiety UK

Phone: 08444 775 774

OCD Action

Phone: 0845 390 6232

Email: support@ocdaction.org.uk

Skype: 0303 040 1112.

OCD Action recommends that if you are currently in therapy for OCD, try contacting your therapist or service provider and ask if they offer skype/phone sessions instead of face-to-face appointments.

➤ **Resources**

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk>

Coronavirus: How to protect your mental health (BBC)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>

Catholic Truth Society: Weekly Blog

<https://www.ctsbooks.org/blog/>

Hozana: Social Prayer Platform

<https://hozana.org/en/>

Ignatian Spirituality

www.ignatianspirituality.com

The International OCD Foundation

<https://iocdf.org/>

Lent in Isolation

<https://www.lentinisolation.com/>

OCD Action and Coronavirus

<https://www.ocdaction.org.uk/articles/covid-19>