

# origins

CNS documentary service

## Coronavirus Pandemic: The New Normal

### Archbishop Gregory

*"I have heard two words recently that I had not heard in a very long time: plague and pestilence," Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory wrote in a March 19 column for The Catholic Standard, the Washington archdiocese's newspaper. The Washington archbishop called the COVID-19 pandemic "unsettling" because unlike historical accounts of accounts of pandemics and prior modern global health challenges, the new coronavirus is "so unpredictable, so pervasive, so close and so current." In a March 12 statement, Archbishop Gregory announced that public Masses in archdiocesan parishes, missions and campus ministries would be canceled*

*"We look forward to a day when we can merely encounter one another without fear."*

*indefinitely beginning March 14, and that all schools in the Washington archdiocese would be closed March 16-27. In his column, Archbishop Gregory said, "I never dreamed as a bishop that one day my best pastoral option would not involve expanding access to the Eucharist but suspending it, let alone at a time of such distress in the church and in the world." The bishop acknowledged that "our sacramental common prayer is a great gift we now miss, its temporary absence a cross we now endure — an unanticipated penance none of us could or would have planned even as Lent recently began on Ash Wednesday." He encouraged Catholics to use lessons learned this "exceptionally barren" Lent to redefine "normal" going forward by focusing more on gratitude, appreciation, service, mercy and joy. Archbishop Gregory's column follows.*

■ have heard two words recently that I had not heard in a very long time: plague and pestilence. Both are referenced many times in Scripture; both carry connotations of a dark and distant past.

Biblical, medieval or modern, we have all read about prior pandemics. The bubonic plague that decimated Europe during the 14th century and the Spanish flu that wreaked havoc at the beginning of the 20th were events to which only historians and medical professionals these days express much more than a passing interest.

We have faced other global health challenges just since the turn of this century

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