

Italian Catholics Protest Church's Capitulation to State Worship Ban

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ROME — More and more Catholics in Italy are voicing their disappointment with Church leadership in the face of violations of religious liberty, including the classification of worship as a nonessential activity.

As Breitbart News [reported](#), the Italian government [declared](#) this week that praying in church is *not* a sufficient reason to leave one's residence under the coronavirus lockdown, unlike activities such as purchasing cigarettes, walking a dog, or going to the supermarket.

In a recent [article](#), Italian journalist Andrea Gagliarducci criticized not only the state's overreach in banning religious practice, but especially the church's easy acquiescence to such overreach.

"The problem is that, while in an emergency, the church is not thinking about defending what she has to defend: freedom of worship," he wrote.

This week, a Catholic advocacy group called Save the Monasteries launched a petition asking bishops to restore Masses and the other sacraments to the faithful during the coronavirus lockdown.

"We appeal for the recognition of the personal need of every member of the Catholic faithful to participate in the Holy Mass so that each person can actively worship while respecting the current legislation," reads the petition, which numerous clergy and laypeople have signed.

"Therefore, we urgently ask of the competent authorities, both ecclesiastical and civil, to resume liturgical celebrations with the participation of the faithful, especially Holy Mass on weekdays and on Sundays, adopting the provisions appropriate to the directives for the Covid-19 health emergency," it states.

On Friday, veteran Vatican journalist Edward Pentin [reported](#) on a series of other influential Catholics who are voicing similar concerns, especially regarding the lack of Church leadership in reasserting the value of religious freedom and the importance of access to the sacraments for Catholics.

The prominent Catholic author Vittorio Messori, who with Pope John Paul II co-authored the [bestseller](#) *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, has criticized the Church for its "hasty suspension" of Masses, Mr. Pentin noted, which "gives the impression of a 'Church in retreat.'"

While "obeying the legitimate authorities is a duty for us," Messori said, creative solutions to make the sacraments available have been lacking as well as a "mobilization of the clergy that defined the Church in past times of plague."

There is, rather, a perception "that the Church herself is afraid, with bishops and priests all taking shelter," Messori said, and the closing of St. Peter's Square gives the impression of a Church "barricaded inside its residence and effectively says: 'Listen, deal with it yourselves; we are just trying to save our own skin.'"

Pentin also cites Italian lawyer Anna Egidia Catenaro, president of Associazione Avvocatura in Missione, a Catholic law association, who said that the government's March 25 decree devaluing the importance of religious practice was "gravely injurious to religious freedom and therefore needs to be changed."

In an "appeal to parliamentarians of goodwill," Catenaro said the decree must be amended "before it is too late," describing the state's limitations on religious activities as "unjustified, inadequate, unreasonable, discriminatory and even unconstitutional in several respects."

Catenaro further insisted that while the government can ask citizens to keep a safe distance from each other, it has "no power" to close churches.

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