

Dear Faithful,

It was almost a year ago, March 12, 2020, that we had to take the extraordinary, unprecedented step to close our churches throughout the Diocese of St. Augustine. We had just begun the Lenten season.

At that time, we undertook precautions to stave off the coronavirus — little did we know that soon, our country would reach 400,000 fatalities connected with COVID-19.

It was May 18, 2020, that we allowed our churches to re-open with regulations in place, including masks and social distancing, to ensure safety for those coming to Mass. With this measure of care in place, we have not had any incidents in our churches and this is encouraging as many people are continuing to come back to Mass. I am so grateful for all the efforts that have been made to ensure the Eucharist can be celebrated in person and done so safely in the parishes throughout our diocese.

This year, our celebration of Ash Wednesday will be different than in years past — as will Holy Week, which we were not able to celebrate together in our parishes last year. But this Lenten season, that soon lies ahead of us, is the same graced season — where we recall the great events that give us new life in Christ. And while we recall these events through our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving; may God bring to greater perfection within each of us the image of his beloved Son.

This coming Lent will be different for us all in many ways, but it certainly sets before us an opportunity to renew deeply a new respect for life — for all life — from conception to natural death. May it also be an opportunity for us all to embrace more profoundly, the Gospel values that led followers of Jesus to reject violence in any form even as we work for social justice.

May this Lent 2021 be a time in which we grow closer to the Lord, reflecting a life of virtue building and greater fraternity.

I ask the favor of you remembering me in your prayers.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, STD

Bishop of St. Augustine