

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

March 17, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The world in which we are living suffers many ills: war, poverty, disease and social unrest. In these present days, we are now all living with the fear and anxiety caused by the pandemic virus, COVID-19.

At all times, we ought to remember the words of Our Lord: “Behold I am with you always”. He is with us in the good times even when we fail to remember Him; He is with us in the bad times even when we are beset by fear and yet feel we must do it all ourselves. At these times I remember a few lines from a Psalm: “Only in God will my soul find rest; from Him comes my hope, my salvation. He alone is my rock of safety, my stronghold in whom I trust.” In times of crisis we must remember this very same God who shows His power when we are weak. St. Paul says: “When I am weak, it is Christ who is strong in me.” St. Paul was able, then, to turn to Christ for strength.

In times of crisis and great uncertainty, we look to this source of strength, our Faith, and we look to factual information to guide us to prudent decisions. That is why I have continued to celebrate Mass, personally, wherever asked, and also closely monitored and will continue to monitor information available from the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services**. Other similarly reliable sources added to the CDC and New Hampshire DHHS have been and will continue to guide the decisions in our own diocese concerning the Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. As news of this situation continues to unfold, I wish to update you now and on an ongoing basis.

The celebration of Mass as we are accustomed to it in the diocese will change in light of the information we are receiving. We are mindful of our obligation to protect the most vulnerable and protect the common good.

I have reminded the priests of our diocese that they must continue to celebrate daily and Sunday Mass with or without anyone present. No matter the circumstance, Canon law, the law governing church matters, requires that the intention for an announced Mass **MUST** be satisfied. Likewise, pastors bear a particular obligation to ensure that the weekly intention of the Mass *Pro Populo* (*for all the people of the parish*) is satisfied, applying the Mass for the welfare of the people entrusted to his care. **It is a great and necessary comfort to those who cannot be present to know that their personal intentions will not be suspended or changed. It is also a great sign of care and a comfort for the people to know that the Mass is still being offered for all of them by their priests.**

As Bishop I intend to visit as many parishes as possible to offer Mass, no matter that the church will have few or be entirely empty. Your Bishop must follow the example of his predecessors who did the same and I am eager to do this to be in solidarity with you and our beloved tireless priests.

In light of the guidance I have received, attendance at **Mass will not be available to the general public**. A priest may include one, two or three members of his parish staff to be present at Mass if he and they so choose. **Any former direction or suggestion is no longer possible**. I encourage our pastors to have their **churches open for extended hours of prayer** and when appropriate, **extended hours of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament**.


It pains me terribly to have to make this decision, but the severity of this world crisis reminds me of Our Lord who was bound and led away from his people to endure a suffering beyond all imagining – and this was done to Jesus who is God! Now, we are bound and led away from one another – we who are the People of God by Baptism. How can we not undergo a portion of the suffering He endured to save us from death?

Mass continues, thanks be to God! For the homebound – which now, many of our Faithful must be, the EWTN Television Network televises the Mass twice a day each day. Boston's Catholic Television also broadcasts the Mass each day. Other television stations and live streamed broadcasts over the internet also provide this limited and incomplete but, nonetheless in these circumstances, precious vehicle of the Church's highest form of prayer. Make this viewing a priority in your home until we can all return to the Mass in our parish home.

Our priests have advised me that **without the regular support** of their parishioners they are very concerned that they will not be able to meet their **regular financial obligations**. Our diocesan offices are eager to help them. Your pastors will most likely reach out to you, hoping that you will continue to support your parish. Please do your best –even if, while you are watching the Mass on television you take up a collection in the living room and arrange for your gift of support to be brought to the parish. Online giving is something many parishioners do so that in snowstorm or while away on vacation their gifts continue. If you'd like, I'm sure our pastors would be willing to help you.

Throughout His Blessed Passion Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father. In the Agony in the Garden He prayed and angels came to minister to Him. During this time, let's follow this example of Jesus' fervent prayers in time of trial. During His walk to Calvary He encountered His Sorrowful Mother. Let's take up the Rosary and The Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Here in these prayers we hear our story already told in the mysteries of the Rosary and in the titles of our Blessed Mother in the Litany. From the Cross Jesus forgave everyone. Let's follow His mercy and heal divisions, forego blame and ask pardon for our own offenses. While in the Tomb, Jesus' body rested after the rigors of the Crucifixion, yet His soul went to Hades to rescue and bring to Heaven the souls of those who had died before. Let's follow Him yet again and take this time of social distancing to allow the body to be less subject to the rigors of having to run from one thing to another with no time to even share a special moment at the family table. Let's spend time with "our own" who might sometimes feel like they are not with us anymore. When the stone was rolled away and the earth shook, the Tomb turned into a chapel of the presence of angels who announced that we had all come through to new Life with the Risen Christ. Let's follow just once more and renew our Baptismal Promises and our belief in the Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. Stronger than when we began, let us be one in Christ!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bishop Libasci".

+ Bishop Libasci