

October 16, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On March 19, 2020, as the Covid-19 was beginning its impact in Florida, I dedicated a year to St. Joseph, Protector for the Faithful of the Diocese of Venice. God appointed St. Joseph the Guardian of the Word Incarnate. Hope in the truth that our prayers to St. Joseph during these days will be graciously heard before the throne of God. Like many moments in her History, Holy Mother Church now faces difficult challenges. However, the hard work of many Priests and Faithful alike have allowed our Parishes to weather these trying times with courage and zeal; and for this I am grateful.

Be assured, I continue to listen to public health data and hear from Priests and Parishioners about the experiences of our Parishes. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass has been extended until November 27, 2020, and depending on conditions, perhaps longer. At the same time, I wish to invite the Catholic Faithful who are able, to return to their Parish for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. How good it would be to see more join their fellow Parishioners who have already returned to Sunday Mass.

It is well known that there are immeasurable spiritual graces imparted when we participate in the Mass. Attending the Eucharist strengthens our Faith and Christian discipleship as the Holy Spirit empowers us to know, love, and serve God. The Blessed Sacrament is also a source of hope and unity for our Parishes, communities, country, and the world. Going forth from the Mass, be confident that you are true witnesses of Christ.

Certainly, Catholics who are ill or because of age or underlying health conditions are vulnerable, and those who care for them, should prudently remain home. Parishes will continue to livestream Masses for those who cannot attend in person. However, as we have experienced during these days, hunger for the Eucharist is only genuinely satisfied when together as the Body of Christ, we draw close to the Real Presence of Our Lord and Savior.

The invitation to return in person for Sunday Mass is accompanied by the promise that safety protocols will continue. That is, masks are still required, and respect for distancing is needed, as well as cleanliness of hands and surfaces remain important. Many have worked diligently to allow us to venture out to restaurants, stores, and other public events, so, too, we can safely return to our Parish and do what is most essential to Catholics, attend Sunday Mass.

Jesus promised to be with us when we gather in His name. Therefore, let us cherish the Lord's Goodness and be fed with the Bread Come Down from Heaven. Please accept this "Pastoral Invitation" and prayerfully consider a return to Sunday Mass if you have not already done so. Your Priests look forward to welcoming you once again at the Table of the Lord.

Through St. Joseph's intercession, I pray that God will bless you and your family. Let us remain united in prayer, lifting up each other's needs to the Heavenly Father.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Frank J. Dewane  
Bishop of the Diocese of  
Venice in Florida

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