



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

April 17, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During Easter Season, as the Church rejoices in Our Lord's Resurrection, my prayer is that you and your family are safe and strengthened by God's grace in these uncertain times. You will recall that I promised to give an update regarding the Coronavirus and our efforts in the Diocese of Venice to ensure the health, safety, and the spiritual wellbeing of all our Catholic Faithful.

The decision to suspend public celebrations of the Liturgy was among the most difficult I have had to make as your Bishop. The decision required the Diocese to weigh the needs of public health in a time of pandemic against the great sacrifices that a suspension would require of the Christian Faithful and our Priests. Knowing it would be difficult for you not to fully participate in the Holy Mass or gather with your fellow Parishioners for other activities, was something I sincerely understood. It was also on my mind that your Priests would need to labor strenuously and find innovative ways to compassionately care for Parishioners.

It has been edifying to see how the Catholic Faithful, led by their Priests, have embraced these challenges and found creative ways to give witness to our spiritual communion in Christ. Throughout these days, I have been privileged to hear many stories from Parishioners about how they have, in their homes, remained Faithful to their life of prayer and worship of God. The efforts of parents, caregivers, Catholic School teachers, catechists, Parish staff and so many of our people, have made the difficulties being experienced an opportunity for heroic acts of Christian Charity and love. Priests are to be acknowledged for the pastoral ways in which the Holy Mass and the Sacraments have been offered to the Faithful; at the same time, placing themselves at risk to attend the sick and dying. Likewise, I am grateful to the Parishioners who have continued their generous stewardship towards the Parishes and Schools of the Diocese which face financial challenges in these present circumstances.

In a particular way, let me express my appreciation to the many families who, from home, united in their Parish Holy Week and Easter Liturgies. All the Faithful can be proud of the efforts made during these difficult days to maintain spiritual communion and practice their Catholic Faith. Trusting in Our Lord who abides with us, we have found hope and strength to weather the hardships.

No matter how difficult this time has been for many of us, I ask you to prayerfully intercede for those who have died from the Coronavirus and for their family and loved ones who grieve. Likewise, please lift-up in prayer healthcare workers and others, who, with dedication, are combating this disease and compassionately caring for the sick and dying. Pray also for wisdom for our public officials that they may guide us with competence and concern.

Please know that the Diocese appreciates the sacrifices you have made and is looking forward to the time when public celebrations of Holy Mass can resume. With me, Diocesan Officials are monitoring public health data as a process of planning begins. It is necessary to determine how and when your Parish can resume normal operations safely, while maintaining careful vigilance to protect those at greater risk of serious illness. The upcoming weeks will indeed require patience. Only after necessary steps are taken, can there be certainty regarding when to begin a phased return to normal Parish activities and public gatherings.

Likely, the present circumstances regarding public Masses will last for the near future. Celebrations of Confirmation, First Communion, and reception into the Church for Catechumens and Candidates will continue to be postponed until it is feasible to reschedule them with some certainty. Parishes will keep the Faithful updated as greater clarity regarding Diocesan plans is possible.

Let us remember that with Faith, our sufferings and sacrifices can be a source of redeeming grace. If we offer our sufferings to God and unite them with the Passion of Our Lord, we will be made stronger in Faith and greater witnesses to the hope that is ours in the Risen Christ.

As we commemorate Divine Mercy Sunday, let each one of us put aside our doubts and united as a believing people, express with new resolve: "Jesus, I trust in You!"

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

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