



My dear friends in Christ,

As we confront almost hourly news reports about rising cases of Coronavirus, additional measures to restrict exposures to the threat of this insidious virus, and concerns about our own health and the wellbeing of our loved ones, we can become very anxious. Yet we are a people of hope, grounded in the faith that God is always with us. As your bishop, I write to you today in these troubling times to remind you of this unshakeable tenet of our Catholic faith.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* (Saved by Hope) stressed how the virtue of hope is critical for anyone who encounters suffering: “[T]he present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey.” (*Spe Salvi* 1). What is that goal for us today? I propose that our first goal is to maintain a courageous spirit of optimism and perseverance during this health crisis. We are responsible for being good stewards of our bodies and for following the advice of medical professionals to minimize risk. By virtue of our baptism we are also called as good citizens to care for others in need, in good times and in bad.

In *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI noted that “It is not science that redeems man: Man is redeemed by love. This applies even in terms of this present world. . . . The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). (SS26)

As people of faith, let us not lose sight of the fact that our ultimate goal is life eternal, to one day enjoy God's life and love eternally. That love is experienced even in this life when we are cared for in times of sickness with compassion, and we in turn become agents of God's love when we help others in need.

So what can we do? I suggest we consider three things: Pray, Listen and Respond.

Pray the *Prayer In Time of Pandemic* which we are sharing through our parishes and institutions. Why? Prayer will ground us in the realization that, first of all, we are not alone. Even when seemingly no one else hears us in our pleas, God always hears us. It reminds us that the truly important things in life are bigger than us and we must set aside our pride to focus on what is truly important in life.

Listen and Respond. Our faith reminds us that grace builds on nature. If we are attentive to the instructions of those around us we will be given the grace to respond. Hence, we must be attentive to the advice of healthcare professionals to protect ourselves but we must also be attentive to the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of others. Pope Francis has observed that his greatest concern regarding how this crisis is unfolding in Italy is that of isolation. Feeling alone and feeling abandoned engender fear, not hope. Are young and elderly family members scared or at risk and need our assurances and help? Are neighbors alone and in need of wellness checks so as to not feel abandoned?

As baptized members of the Body of Christ, we also have a responsibility to the greater community of faith. In the weeks ahead, our faith life may be greatly challenged by not being able to attend Mass. We will have to fast from the very sustenance for which our souls yearn during this Lent, the Holy Eucharist. Again I stress - do not lose hope. As your parishes communicate with you, I hope they will remind you that you can at least pray together with the Catholic community in our diocese through our Sunday and Daily Masses on the internet and on Spectrum (Charter) Channel 193. You may also have access to the Mass on Catholic TV from Boston if you are on a different cable company or satellite TV. You can make a Spiritual Communion as you spiritually prepare for the day, God willing, when you can return to the Banquet of the Lord at Easter.

As members of the Diocese of Worcester, I also implore you not to lose sight of how we are serving so many people in need every day through our parish ministries and our diocesan agencies. Your call to be good stewards through the parish offertory is

needed now as much as ever, as well as your continued support for the annual Partners in Charity Appeal which is a lifeline for diocesan-wide service to thousands of people who are physically and spiritually in need. However, in light of these difficult times, I have suspended the activities of our diocesan capital campaign, Legacy of Hope, until these difficult times are behind us, in order to stay focused on addressing present needs. I encourage you to take advantage of online giving portals for your parish and Partners in Charity or simply continue to support your offertory by mail.

In closing, I ask that you join me in the following *Prayer in Time of Pandemic* and that you do so every day until this health crisis has passed.

*O God, whose Only Begotten Son bore the weight of human suffering for our salvation,  
hear the prayers of your Church for our sick brothers and sisters and deliver us from this time of trial.*

*Open our ears and our hearts to the voice of your Son: Be not afraid, for I am with you always.*

*Bless all doctors and nurses, researchers and public servants;  
give us the wisdom to do what is right and the faith to endure this hour,  
that we might gather once again to praise your name in the heart of your Church,  
delivered from all distress and confident in your mercy.*

*Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

May God protect you and your loved ones through this time of trial.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus  
Bishop of Worcester