



Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

Easter 2021

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Imagine the joy of Christ's grieving followers gathered in the Upper Room when on Easter the Risen Lord suddenly appeared and said, "Peace be with you." Their joy and peace at Christ's Victory must have been unbounded as they recognized Him in their presence.

But not all of Christ's followers shared that joy. Saint Thomas, who was absent, experienced not joy but doubt. Two other disciples after hearing of Christ's Resurrection, instead of immediately joining the others, departed Jerusalem and were downcast. Even when Jesus drew near and spoke to them of the Scriptures, they did not recognize Him. Only in the breaking of the bread (the Eucharist) did they recognize Him. Only then did they return to Jerusalem to join the disciples assembled in the Upper Room and share in the joy of Easter.

On this Easter Sunday, after a year of COVID isolation, when we seek peace and joy amidst doubts and losses we can profitably reflect on the importance of gathering at the Eucharist. As Jesus came to the disciples gathered together in Jerusalem so, too, He is most present to us, not in our individual reflections upon the Scriptures, but when the Scriptures and Eucharist are celebrated at Mass.

It has been a long year with necessary and prudent precautions keeping many of us from Sunday Mass. Given the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID pandemic, personal prayer, reading the Scriptures and watching the Mass live-streamed have been prudent choices for many. However, such choices are all inferior to being present at Sunday Mass and receiving the Holy Eucharist, which the Second Vatican Council proclaimed as the source and summit of the Church. Like St. Thomas and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it is harder to recognize Jesus, ward off doubts and avoid being downcast by the trials and tragedies of life when we are not nourished by the Eucharist at Sunday Mass.

As signs of progress in the COVID pandemic begin to give way to hope for a return to a more normal life, and as vaccines become more widely available, it may be time to begin to consider prayerfully a return to Sunday Mass. Certainly, everyone needs to consult family and doctors and use prudence taking into account one's own circumstances and health. Our parishes will continue to require masks and social distancing and employ sanitary precautions. As society moves towards reopening, may the Holy Spirit guide you, along with prudent medical advice, in your consideration about coming back to Sunday Mass in the weeks and months ahead.

With every prayerful best wish for a joyous Easter, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester