



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO
Office of the Bishop

May 16, 2021 Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

May the grace and peace of God our Father, the Joy of the Risen and Ascended Lord, and the power of the Holy Spirit be with you!

On this beautiful Solemnity of the Ascension, as we remember the “Great Commission Jesus gave to His Apostles, and to all of us: *“Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature”* (Mk 16:15), I write to you with a hope-filled message, announcing another step forward in the midst of this unprecedented and long-standing worldwide battle with COVID-19.

As you well remember, after we, and much of the world, were completely restricted to our homes for the better part of three months early in 2020, it was on the Solemnity of Pentecost in 2020 when we were able to return to the public celebration of the Mass. Throughout those months, and since Pentecost of 2020, there has been in place a “General Dispensation” from the obligation to attend Mass in person for all the Faithful of our Diocese. We are now at another very important step forward in this ongoing battle; it is time for us to reignite our devotion, and see the practice of our Faith as a high priority in our spiritual lives.

While we all realize that the pandemic is by no means over, we all need to, and long for, a return to the celebration of Mass and the ability to receive the Sacraments. Since we are returning to some level of normalcy in many aspects of our lives, regarding both our employment lives and social events, we must also do so in regard to the most important part of our lives: the practice of our Faith. More and more people in Southwest Michigan have been fully vaccinated, and the numbers of people becoming fully vaccinated continues to grow. *I have received both my vaccinations, and I hope that all people will consider taking advantage of this important way to protect themselves, as well as to help ensure the health and well-being of others around us. May this vaccine contribute to the successful eradication of this coronavirus.*

In light of those positive realities, it is time to remove the “General Dispensation” from the obligation to come to Mass each week. **This will take effect on the Solemnity of Pentecost, one week from today, on the weekend of May 22-23, 2021.** At that time, the normal expectations regarding the practice of our Faith will once again be in effect, which includes the obligation to participate, in-person, in the celebration of Holy Mass each weekend for all who are able to do so. A person who is able to do so, but chooses not to come to Mass, is guilty of a mortal sin, in light of the grave responsibility that each person has to “keep Holy the Lord’s Day” by coming to Mass each Sunday. Of course, if a person is unable to do so, due to sickness or other serious risks or concerns, the obligation does not apply; that person is dispensed by virtue of his or her particular circumstances.

All parishes within the Diocese of Kalamazoo will continue to observe the “Guidelines for Return to Public Mass”, and we will still follow all safety protocols, including social distancing and the wearing of masks as outlined by health authorities. These Guidelines will be modified as needed, and as circumstances change in the future.

My hope and prayer for all of us now is that, despite the traumatic experience we have all endured throughout this past year, we will allow the Holy Spirit, Who filled the hearts of the Apostles on the first Pentecost and turned them into “fearless witnesses”, to fill our hearts as well. May Pentecost 2021 be a time when each of us will personally invite the Holy Spirit to renew, empower, and embolden us to be joyful disciples and effective witnesses to the Risen and Ascended Jesus in our lives.

Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Church, and St. Joseph, the Protector of the Holy Family, may we be strengthened in our *Faith* in God, renewed in our *Hope* for what God wills for us in our Future, and determined to *Love* God and one another as Jesus loves us all.

Assuring you of my heartfelt prayers for you, and asking that we always pray for one another, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo