



Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

November 7, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Ite, missa est: “Go forth, the Mass is ended.” The Mass (in Latin: *missa*) takes its name from this phrase that concludes the Eucharistic Celebration. Originally, the formula simply served to dismiss the participants, but over time it has come to signify the mission of the Church. In the Mass, communion leads to mission. First, Christ gathers us as his Church: to speak to us, to draw us into his death and resurrection, and to feed us with his sacrificed body and blood. Then he sends us back into the world to announce this work of salvation in our daily lives.

Communion and mission are also at work in this weekend’s Eucharistic Congress, which is the culmination of the bicentennial jubilee of our diocese. A Eucharistic Congress is a large-scale gathering of a local Church—bishop, priests, deacons, religious, and lay people—for the purpose of deepening our understanding and appreciation of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Since it is Jesus Christ himself, the Eucharist encapsulates the Church’s mission: to gather people at the sacred banquet of the Savior, which is the beginning of heaven (cf. Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10).

During this past year, the various bicentennial events have expressed the unity of our local Church across its vast territory, and the common endeavor of bearing witness to Christ through the centuries. Together, we have looked back in gratitude at nearly 500 years of Catholic faith in Virginia—from even before the Diocese of Richmond was established (1820)—and we look forward to accomplishing the Church’s work in our own time and in the future.

That work has become more challenging because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic; gathering is difficult, and many people are isolated. All of us have had to adapt to this new situation. Nevertheless, the Catholic faithful continue to do God’s work, as they always have.

To encourage our participation in the Church’s perennial mission, I have asked that special readings and prayers, for the evangelization of peoples, be used at Masses this weekend throughout the diocese.

Assisted by the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Star of the Sea who guides us to her Son, may we carry out the Church’s mission announced in the Mass. Our bicentennial motto points to the Eucharist as the power to complete that work: “Shine like stars in the world, as you hold fast to the word of life” (Phil 2:15–16).

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond