



Diocese of Austin

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Office of the Bishop

Pastoral Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese of Austin

April 30, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant hardship to our diocese, nation, and world. Sadly, many people have died, and many are sick and suffering from the virus. Also, many are struggling financially and burdened with the reality of isolation and fear.

As Catholics, we have endured the suspension of Mass and the sacraments. I have heard from many of you who have expressed your hunger for the Eucharist and the need for the spiritual strength received at Mass. The sacrifices you have made are truly acts of charity and witness to the sanctity of human life.

Based on the latest data and information from government and public health authorities, I am now ready to move forward in reopening our churches for the celebration of the sacraments. Reopening will be done in a careful and phased manner, following Governor Abbott's recommendations to businesses and institutions. I have provided our priests with protocols to guide them with the necessary steps to reopen. I am confident that our priests will be careful and measured in implementing these protocols.

Therefore, today I issued a decree that public Masses will resume effective May 5, 2020. **Of important note, my dispensation of the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation remains in effect.** I do this out of concern for the elderly, those with underlying health conditions, and the sick who are at higher risk in contracting COVID-19. Furthermore, knowing that it will not be possible for all people to come to Mass on Sundays as we begin reopening, I ask that the faithful be patient and consider attending on a different day of the week. We are still limited in our ability to fully congregate, but it is important to me that the faithful have access to the Eucharist and Confession. Parishes will continue to livestream Mass for those who are unable to attend.

Brothers and sisters, I am grateful for your continued prayers, fidelity and patience during this unprecedented time in history. Throughout this difficult time, God continues to accompany us; let us turn to Him to strengthen our faith and have confidence in his compassionate love for us.

This has also been a trying time for our priests, so I ask you to please join me in praying for them as they continue to serve you faithfully and in creative ways. Let us also remember in our prayers those who are caring for the sick and for those who are providing necessary services for the common good.

May the Risen Christ continue to strengthen us in hope, and may God keep us all united in his love.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin