



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

August 24, 2020
St. Bartholomew, Apostle

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we are all well aware, it has been a little more than five months since we began to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to initiate unprecedented restrictions to our coming together for public Masses. I remember vividly that date of March 20, 2020 when I first issued a General Dispensation from the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass. While we were able to return to the public celebration of Mass two months later on May 31, 2020, the Solemnity of Pentecost, we have done so limiting attendance to no more than 25 percent of each church's capacity and following protocols for social distancing, mask wearing and strict hygienic practices. During these past months a General Dispensation was granted to remain in effect until September 6, 2020 in order to accommodate people who were in a vulnerable category, who were medical personnel/caregivers, or even for those who were seriously concerned for their safety in gatherings of people.

Even though I had hoped that by now, we would be at a point that some of these restrictions would be lifted, it is clear at present that is not the case. Therefore, **I am extending the existing General Dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days through Sunday, November 22, 2020**, the Last Sunday of the Church Year. I do so with the hope that as we celebrate the beginning of the new Church Year on the first Sunday of Advent on November 30, 2020, the overall situation will have improved and, hopefully, a General Dispensation at that time will no longer be needed.

However, even as I extend this General Dispensation, I must share with you a growing concern that I have about how these more than five months, during which most of our Faithful people have not been coming to Mass in person, might begin---perhaps subconsciously---to encourage a habit of allowing Sunday to become just like any other day.

It is important that we remember the very serious obligation we all have of coming together as People of Faith, to worship and praise God in the best possible way that Jesus has provided for us: by coming together for the Holy Mass and by celebrating the Eucharist. In light of this, the General Dispensation is a special, temporary accommodation for an extraordinary situation. Those who are able to safely attend Mass should make every effort to do so. I am grateful for the diligent and committed efforts of our clergy and lay leaders in taking all the necessary, additional safety precautions to keep everyone as safe as possible while at church. There are also those Parish Collaboratives offering Mass outdoors to accommodate more people, and I invite you to consider that option as well. As you examine your own daily activities (returning to work or school, going to restaurants, attending social gatherings, etc.), please make every effort to return to the practice of Sunday Mass as soon as you can safely do so.

I also wish to clarify that this General Dispensation is **not** a dispensation from the equally serious obligation that we all have to be faithful to the Third Commandment, "To keep holy the Lord's Day". Even though there is nothing that will equal attending Mass in person, I ask you to consider the possibility of, individually, as a couple, or as a family, prayerfully participating in Sunday Mass through one of the many live-streamed weekly Sunday Masses available to us. If you are unable to do that, perhaps you can spend time prayerfully reading and reflecting on the Scripture Readings for that particular Sunday (which can be found at www.diokzoo.org). You may also consider praying the Rosary together, praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet together, or performing some Spiritual or Corporal Works of Mercy together. Performing one, or all of these pious actions, will assist you to remain in the habit of worshipping God on Sundays.

As your Bishop and your Pastor, I want all of us to stay safe and be well, fully aware that this pandemic is far from over, and that this COVID-19 virus is not ready to loosen its hold on us quite yet. However, I also appeal to you from *my heart* to not let *your hearts* grow cold by allowing bad habits to form; rather let us consciously choose to develop the virtues of prayerfulness, praise, and awareness of God's Presence in our lives. Let us actively express our love for Jesus, and our faith in our loving God who wants nothing more than for us to be united to Him, and to one another. In the beautiful words of St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans from yesterday's Mass (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time):

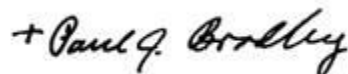
Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways! For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen." (Rom 11:33-36)

As we give our praise and thanks to God our Father, we continue to ask His blessings upon us all in these challenging times, praying that we will emerge from these days as truly courageous disciples and joyful witnesses of our Lord Jesus, and, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we will radiate Jesus' love to all the world. Let us continue to trust in the intercession of our Blessed Mother, to whom our Diocese has been consecrated, that her maternal prayers will obtain the graces and guidance we need during these times, and bring an end to the pandemic.

Assuring you of my daily prayers and remembrances before the Lord, and asking that we continue to pray for one another, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul J. Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo