

August 6, 2021

To the people of the Diocese of Shreveport:

I don't know if I ever shared this story with you about a pastor who was always looking for a way to get his parishioner's attention on any given subject. One week he decided to have a huge sign printed which he placed over the entrance of the Church. It read, "THROUGH THESE DOORS WALK SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD!" It was a big success – because it was just one of a number of things he did to let people know that he appreciated them.

I thought, in light of the new mandate for the wearing of masks indoors just reinstated by our Governor this past week – that I would tell you that if I could put that sign on each of our Churches I would do that – not just because it's true, but because I feel pretty much the same way as you do about wearing masks, and that since I have an obligation to tell you about this mandate – which won't be received with great enthusiasm or joy – I might as well tell you something that just might soften the message a little.

So here it is: the Governor has reinstated the mask mandate for the entire state of Louisiana until September – and it seems as though we just put the previous mandate to bed – and now here we go again. The facts cannot be disputed: the number of fellow Louisianans who have contracted the Covid variant has increased so rapidly within such a short period of time – that our State ranks at or near the top of the entire country with this new variant – and if that doesn't scare the average person – nothing will.

We are all in this together – we belong to one another – we have an obligation – not only to protect ourselves but one another – and ONE tool we have that we can easily use is a face mask. **I AM NOT DIRECTING THAT THOSE WHO DO NOT WEAR MASKS BE REFUSED ADMISSION TO OUR CHURCHES** – but I AM asking everyone to bear with us as this mandate is an attempt to get this new variant under control.

One of the saddest experiences of my short life as your bishop was when COVID first hit – and I walked into the Cathedral under the new directives – and the Church was empty – It was like a punch to the gut – and I never want to go back to empty Churches and the many other mandates that virtually closed us down. It was a very bad time to be a bishop – a pastor – and I know it had to be a very bad time for you. But there is ONE thing we can do to get on top of this, one thing among many, but this one thing that can help – wear a mask – not just to Church, but wherever you are going that takes you indoors. Evidence shows that failure to take actions like this might shut our doors, and I cannot imagine going through that again.

And while I am also convinced that getting the vaccine is the prudent thing to do – failure for us to act against this virus will be our own undoing. Think, for just a moment, of your parish Church. Imagine a HUGE sign over the front doors which reads, "THROUGH THESE DOORS WALK SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD!" And then join me in the difficult responsibility of protecting one another by wearing a mask for our own good and the good of others.

I truly love you, all of you, each of you. We can do this, and I ask you, as your bishop to put the masks back on – and let's band together to beat this pandemic once for all!

Sincerely and lovingly in Christ,
Bishop Francis Malone
Bishop of Shreveport