



DIOCESE OF VICTORIA

Office of the Bishop

September 17, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On September 3rd Pope Francis approved a letter of encouragement for the universal Church to begin considering the return to Sunday worship. Cardinal Robert Sarah, the Prefect of the Congregation of Worship wrote the letter and titled it beautifully: "Let us return to the Eucharist with joy!" This letter reminded me that we are baptized members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Holy Father, Pope Francis oversees the pastoral care of men and women across the whole world. The current pandemic remains global in scale, and each area continues to experience its effects in different ways.

In our area I issued strict guidelines for the re-opening of Churches on May 1st. I need to be clear that in our area neither the Governor nor any state or local official mandated closing of Churches. They respected our freedom of worship, and the decisions I made were based on consultations with local health officials, parishioners, pastors and other bishops. In consideration of the pandemic I offered a general dispensation from the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass, and extended this dispensation through September 30th.

Effective October 1st, the general dispensation will expire and the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will be restored. In this circumstance individuals have the capacity to make pastoral judgments about whether they can fulfill the obligation. For example, persons most at risk of serious complications from respiratory illnesses or persons experiencing anxiety of being in an indoor crowd could prayerfully discern that they cannot fulfill the obligation. Some advice I often offer to people in these cases is to bring the issue to the priest in the Sacrament of Penance, and to trust in the healing mercy of God Who desires that each person share eternal life.

The letter I referenced above states:

"Aware that God never abandons the humanity He has created, and that even the hardest trials can bear fruits of grace, we have accepted our distance from the Lord's altar as a time of eucharistic fasting, useful for us to rediscover its vital importance, beauty and immeasurable preciousness. As soon as possible, however, we must return to the Eucharist with a purified heart, with a renewed amazement, with an increased desire to meet the Lord, to be with him, to receive him and to bring him to our brothers and sisters with the witness of a life full of faith, love and hope."

Before September 23rd I will be issuing new protocols for our parishes to follow in the coming months. May each of us in the diocese of Victoria keep the whole world in our heart - praying for health and healing, praying that we may never be found indifferent to the pain of others and praying for the salvation of all souls, "especially those in most need of God's mercy."

God bless you and your families, let's keep each other in prayer,

+Brendan Cahill