



DIOCESE OF WINONA-ROCHESTER

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Easter Season, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Over a year ago, life drastically changed for all of us, when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Some changes were unimaginable, such as the protocols that limited those who could be present for the celebration of Mass with their pastors and especially for the Sacred Liturgies of Holy Week and Easter. The Eucharist is central to our Catholic life because it is the presence of the Risen Christ who builds up the Church for mission and prepares us for eternal life. The decision to suspend public celebrations of Masses was the most difficult and serious decision I have ever made. It was a most painful decision for me, as I thought of our priests and our faithful parishioners, who center their lives around the Eucharist and the celebration of the Mass.

However, Christ is the Light of the World. His promise to be with the Church to the end of time fills us with hope and assures us that the power of grace is always at work, even in the darkest hours of our life. Due to the blessing of technology, there have been live streamed Masses from the Cathedral and from many of our parishes that have reached thousands of God's people in their homes, and which have been a source of evangelization to countless thousands who tuned in from around the world. In addition to daily Mass, our pastors found creative ways to make available the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and the Sacrament of Penance. Even with all these generous efforts by priests, deacons and lay ministers, parishioners would write to me and express their yearning and desire for the Eucharist. They agreed that televised Masses were a blessing but that it didn't provide the opportunity for them to receive the Eucharist, the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. They wanted to participate in the celebration of Mass in the presence of their brothers and sisters in Christ and receive the Eucharistic Lord.

A lot has happened in this pandemic and grace always abounds. Our lives are beginning to resume normalcy with the return of routine activities such as shopping, going to restaurants and attending sporting events. Most importantly, public Masses have resumed at about half capacity, to accommodate social distancing. Our Catholic Schools have remained open with students present since August 2020, due to our dedicated administrators, teachers and parents. Vaccinations are becoming increasingly available and the wearing of masks and social distancing have become standard practice for us.

As part of our gradual return to normalcy, I am inviting our Catholic community to reflect on their attendance and participation in the Eucharist, especially if a person is healthy and has resumed routine activities that are public and done in the presence of other people. I ask the question: if you are able to resume public activities, should you not be attending Mass? If you have an underlying health condition, are a care giver, or are sick, please stay at home and be safe. Also, it might be that your parish church is already at capacity for worshipers. However, if there is not room for you at a Sunday Mass, you might consider going to Mass during the week.

In time, the COVID-19 pandemic will pass into history but the Church will still be celebrating the Eucharist until the Lord returns in glory. St. Teresa of Avila said, "All things pass away, only God never changes." If you are healthy and are able, I encourage you to return to the Eucharist out of love and not obligation, even now while the dispensation from Sunday Mass is still in effect. Blessed are you!

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ John M. Quinn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. John M. Quinn
Bishop of Winona-Rochester