May 21, 2020

The Ascension of the Lord

My dear Brother Priests:

I am pleased to receive and transmit to you the diocesan Directives for the re-opening of our churches for public worship. In so doing I extend my very sincere gratitude to the members of the committee who have worked diligently to assemble these Directives and accompanying material: Msgr. Albert Kenney, V.G., Moderator of the Curia; Father Jeremy Rodrigues, Director of the Office of Divine Worship; Father Nathan Ricci, Assistant Chancellor of the Diocese; Father William Ledoux, representing the Council of Priests; and Father James Sullivan, O.P., Pastor of St. Pius V Church in Providence. The Committee also benefitted greatly from the guidance of Dr. Timothy Flanigan, a highly regarded expert in infectious diseases and a permanent deacon of the Diocese. We are all most grateful for Dr. Flanigan’s valuable assistance.

The Directives draw heavily from those published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops which utilized recommendations from the Dominican Thomistic Institute. And Msgr. Kenney has collaborated very closely with public officials in developing these guidelines.

As you will see, the Directives are rather comprehensive and detailed, but no policy statement is able to envision every possible pastoral and liturgical situation that might arise. While you are urged to take these policies and procedures very seriously and to do your best to follow them carefully, your patience, flexibility and good judgment will also be key ingredients to their successful implementation.

The re-opening of our churches for public worship, even with the necessary restrictions, is a moment of grace for all of us. Our priority is to do all that we reasonably can to protect the health of our people, priests, and liturgical ministers while also providing the salvific grace of the Holy Mass and the sacraments which, for believers, is indeed an essential service, allowing us to share in the life of Christ and opening for us the doors of eternal life. On this Feast of the Ascension we look to the future with hope, and we trust in the coming of the Holy Spirit to assist us now and in the days to come.

With fraternal best wishes, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Thomas J. Tobin
Bishop of Providence