



Oct. 1, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I write to you as we are in the midst of so many difficulties, foremost among them, the pandemic. One of the hardest things about the pandemic is that there are so many unknowns. Will we remain safe if we follow precautions? Should children go back to school? When will we have a vaccine? What will the colder months bring?

As your bishop, I have additional concerns on my mind. With the help of advisors and colleagues, we are doing our best to respond to the ever-changing directives that have come from the CDC and the Pennsylvania Department of Health. I was very impressed with the efforts people made when we had to stop offering Mass in public for a few months. Many of our pastors and parishioners became familiar with new technologies in order to be together, at least virtually, in prayer.

More recently, pastors have worked hard to implement protocols allowing us to return to worship safely and celebrate the sacraments. It is heartening to see so many of you coming back to Sunday Mass, even as the dispensation from the obligation to do so remains in place.

Each of you must continue to discern whether or not to attend Mass in person. It is difficult to know what the coming months will bring as we are more confined to indoor activities and the flu season will be upon us. That is why I am proceeding cautiously at this time. I do not want to have to stop public Masses again.

Livestreaming has been a great gift to us. If you have not returned to Mass in person, I hope you are attending via livestream each Sunday. It's important to gather the family to worship together. Use the opportunity to really participate in the Mass: say the prayers out loud and offer the responses. Have the Spiritual Communion prayer we posted online available so you can offer it while those at Mass are receiving the Eucharist in person.

Worship is about the community coming together for the celebration of Mass. It is not about our individual relationship with the Lord. I long for the time when I no longer have to watch my sisters and brothers pray; I want to pray with them. We need to be with each other, in person.



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Certainly, when you look at the life of Christ, he was always in community. At the Last Supper, he was surrounded by the community of the Apostles he knew and loved.

Even as we look forward to the future, our spiritual journey should never be on pause. Although our routines have been disrupted, our relationship with Christ doesn't change. He is still very much here and very open to our desire to know him better. This is a moment to recognize how much we need Christ and how much we need to develop our relationship with him.

I want to recognize the extra demands on younger families who are not finding a lot of quiet in their lives, especially now that most children are navigating a less-than-normal back-to-school season. Try to respond to the needs of the moment with love; that in itself, is prayer.

My thoughts and prayers also are with the people who have been hardest hit by the effects of the pandemic. Some have experienced significant health challenges, others have known great loss. We have sisters and brothers in serious need as a result of unemployment.

These are, indeed, difficult times. But they will not last forever. All of us have known moments of fear or discouragement — that's to be expected. We are called upon to use the intelligence God has given us and, as Christians, to live in hope. What are you learning about yourself through this experience? How are you using it to grow in relationship with Christ as well as with those closest to your heart?

Thanksgiving is just around the corner. It may be a little different than what we're accustomed to. But let's take advantage of this national holiday to focus on gratitude, even for the gift of life that God has given us and for the gifts of our faith, our families, our friends and our fellow parishioners.

As I celebrate the eighth anniversary as your bishop today, I assure you of my deep gratitude to God for bringing me to the Diocese of Erie. I am grateful for all of you who have welcomed me so fully. I can truly say I feel at home. What more could I ask for?

We have met many challenges of the past. Let us call upon the Lord to walk with us in the present, to help us find the goodness and fruit therein and to give us the grace to look forward, in hope, to the future.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Lawrence T. Persico

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
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