



323/2021
22 March 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we approach the most sacred time in the life of the Church and prepare to celebrate another Easter Season together, I want to acknowledge the challenges, difficulties and blessings we have experienced during the past year of the pandemic. One year ago, who would have guessed all that we would have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We never would have imagined that over 500,000 people would lose their lives from the virus, some of them our friends, relatives, and fellow parishioners. We never would have thought that the obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sundays would be suspended, publicly celebrated Masses would be cancelled for several months, and we would have experienced isolation, confinement, the wearing of masks and social distancing for over a year. Added to this we also experienced deep political division, racial tension, riots in our streets and in our nation's capital, and a general unrest in our hearts. But now we must slowly begin to pull ourselves together and move forward with the faith, generosity and charity that is expected from all who claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

I want to acknowledge and express my gratitude to so many of you who have cooperated with your local pastors and church leaders by going above and beyond the call of duty through your generosity to Catholic Charities and supporting the work of the church. Thank you for continuing to live your faith by participating in corporal works of mercy, continuing your prayer life, and taking opportunities to deepen your spiritual life through in-person or streamed celebrations of Holy Mass and other devotions done in the silence of your homes.

Thank you for helping to keep the Church alive and well despite all the hectic and unexpected roadblocks along the way. We all need to thank so many of our priests, deacons, pastoral ministers and parish staffs for their creativity, courage, great patience and dedication to us during the past year. They did an outstanding job moving ahead with all of the unknowns and changing instructions, making adjustments, implementing new directives, struggling to determine how to reach out and minister to parishioners in the various parishes throughout the diocese. Our clergy, pastoral ministers, catechists, administrators, parishioners, young and old responded in heroic and selfless ways to ensure that the proclamation of the Gospel never stopped and the Sacraments continued to be celebrated either in-person or able to be viewed by way of online streaming, although the later was not ideal. I am also so proud of our Catholic schools that were ready to go online the day after in-person classes were cancelled and then returned to in-class instruction last fall. Our school teachers are heroes to many of our children in our Catholic schools.

All of us were stretched beyond imagination and frustrated by the limitations of the past year. It was also difficult for me to come as your new bishop mid-pandemic. Through it all, however, God

certainly did provide. God gave us what we needed, especially in the most difficult times. God remains a steadfast help in times of need. The cross of the past year, if we permitted it, made us people of deeper faith, closer as families, and more appreciative of parish life.

But we are not quite done yet. Even though we are beginning to get this pandemic under control, the virus still remains, and we all need to remain vigilant until that time when masks are no longer necessary and appropriate social distancing is no longer expected. The health and safety of everyone, especially those whose health is compromised in any way, is of extreme importance and these ordinary means of protecting life are have proven to be helpful. Remember that patience is like all the virtues. It comes with practice. And, if these limitations and temporary requirements were a great burden to us, they were also the sufferings that we able to endure and offer up for the salvation of souls, our own included.

Although the dispensation from the Sunday Mass remains in effect at the present time, we are never exempted from keeping the Lord's Day holy. Continue to make Sunday a day of prayer, rest, and family. We will continue to offer live streaming at the diocesan website www.dioceseofcleveland.org and, if available, on your local parish website. However, as we begin to get outside of our homes, visit restaurants and attend sporting events, it will also become the time for us to return to the altar at our parish churches where we can receive the Body and Blood of Christ for ourselves as the true food of eternal life. For Jesus has said to us, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him on the last day" (John 6:54).

Yes, there is hope on the horizon. As more and more people become immune to COVID-19, our churches, schools, parish events and diocesan events will eventually return to normal. I hope that we return to better than normal. I ask you to pray for that.

As your bishop, I thank you, the faithful, for your cooperation in this difficult and confusing time. I look forward to the days and months ahead trusting that we all may be one in our commitment to remain faithful to the Lord and supportive of each other.

It is good to be the Bishop of Cleveland. I am blessed to be among you at this time of grace for all of us.

God bless you and those you love.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward C. Malesic". The signature is written in a cursive style and is preceded by a small cross symbol.

Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic, JCL
Bishop of Cleveland