Diocese of Cleveland
Cathedral Square

314/2020
12 May 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The coronavirus pandemic has brought us together in solidarity as we respond with careful focus and deep resolve to take care of one another during these troubled times that challenge us, our families, our communities and the world. As we endure this serious situation, we take comfort in the words of Jesus as he reminds us: "and behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."(Matt:28:20 – NABRE)

The bishops of Ohio and I have met since mid-March to discuss recommendations and requirements put into place by the state of Ohio and medical experts on our approach to dealing with the virus pandemic. Consequently -- and very reluctantly -- we agreed to suspend the public celebration of Mass beginning on 17 March 2020, to ensure the safety of the faithful and the common good of our communities.

After much discussion, and with proper consultation with the bishops of Ohio and the College of Consultors, I announce that we will begin to reopen the churches of our diocese for the celebration of public Mass beginning with weekday Mass starting on May 25. This will be done only where it can be achieved safely and where pastorally possible -- with less than 50% occupancy of the church building and respecting social distancing. This plan provides for the possibility of the gradual return to the public celebration of Mass and prepares us to celebrate the solemnity of Pentecost the weekend of May 30-31, when Sunday Mass will be celebrated publicly.

We have asked our pastors with their parish staffs to put into place a rigorous effort to fulfill specific guidelines to help keep us safe which includes instructions on maintaining social distancing, recommendations to provide a safe environment and instructions for the distribution of Holy Communion. These guidelines can be viewed on the diocesan website, www.dioceseofcleveland.org

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in effect. The bishops of Ohio and I continue to be cautious and concerned for those who are most at risk -- the elderly and those with serious health issues. I strongly urge those who are most vulnerable to stay at home and we implore those who are not feeling well to refrain from coming to church.

I am deeply grateful to our clergy, religious and lay leaders who continued to show their love and genuine care for our people by connecting with parishioners in innovative ways. There have been many Masses livestreamed by parishes. Other parish activities included connecting with parishioners through phone calls. Some parishes opened their churches for private devotions or created inspiring videos for their websites. Thanks to everyone who played a role in strengthening our Catholic solidarity during these very challenging times.

Together we continue to pray for all who are suffering from COVID-19, for all health care workers and first responders, for all the deceased and their families and for an easing of the anxiety and tension caused by this pandemic. Relying on the motherly care of Our Lady, especially during this month of May, we unite our sufferings to those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we trust in the glorious hope of his Resurrection.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Donald P. Oleksiak

Reverend Donald P. Oleksiak
Diocesan Administrator
Diocese of Cleveland