



July 15, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

As you have heard, the Catholic bishops of Pennsylvania have issued statements indicating that the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass, which went into effect in March 2020 — just as the pandemic began significantly impacting all facets of life in the United States — will soon be lifted. I am reinstating the obligation to attend Mass in person on Sundays and holy days in the Diocese of Erie beginning on Sunday, Aug. 15, 2021, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As always, the obligation does not apply to those with serious illness or health risks, as well as their caregivers.

For most of us, the thought of a global pandemic impacting nearly every aspect of our lives had never crossed our minds. As I said in my letter to you in March of 2020, given the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, I made the best decisions I could for the good of the community, especially the most vulnerable among us.

I am deeply grateful to the clergy in our diocese who did everything they could to respond to the challenges. Many used technology to include parishioners in livestreamed Masses, prayer services and events. Others were creative in their efforts to remain in touch, assuring you of their prayers and support. Still others were called upon in these extraordinary circumstances to be present to COVID patients and their families.

I also want to extend my thanks to each of you. People in every stage of life were faced with significant sacrifices — from children attending school remotely and adults navigating unexpected challenges, to young adults rethinking social interactions and postponing important plans. All the while, our elderly parishioners faced a time of deep isolation. My heart is especially with those of you whose livelihoods were disrupted and those of you who lost loved ones due to the pandemic. I know your pain was increased as a result of the many restrictions we had to endure.

St. Paul tells us we are to rejoice in the Lord always. While I will not minimize the pain and difficulties we have faced — and will continue to face in new ways — I encourage you to reflect on what he says in his letter to the Philippians 4:4-7:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Many of you have begun returning to Sunday Mass, and I am hearing from pastors that there is a sense of renewal and of deepened appreciation for the Eucharist and for our parish communities. It is my hope and my prayer we all will continue to grow in our faith and live in the peace God promises.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, pray for us.
St. Patrick, patron of the Diocese of Erie, pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
+Lawrence T. Persico

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