



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

May 15, 2020

To the Faithful of the Diocese of St. Augustine,

After so many weeks separated from the Eucharist daily and on the weekends, we should rejoice that we can once again gather for Mass!

I hope that everyone will be mindful of the constraints that require our parishes and missions to make some difficult decisions about how and how often Mass will be available. I urge patience and charity as I know that pastors and their leadership teams have worked long and hard to decide the best possible arrangements for each parish and mission. They have been guided by diocesan guidelines that I promulgated regarding social-distancing, sanitizing spaces, and necessary liturgical changes — no offertory processions, no physical contact at the sign of peace, no hand-holding at the Lord's Prayer, no communion for the faithful from the cup, and Communion only in the hand.

Jesus was clear several times in the Gospels that laws and customs regarding the Sabbath fall away when human needs are in question — when there is a “life” issue that outweighs some other tradition or custom.

Our monitoring our own behaviors and conduct is at the heart of charity — which we are called to at all times; but is also at the heart of “life” issues we must all attend to always. In fact, our need to care for the needs of others — especially our seniors and all those immune impaired — by our social distancing at this time — and being responsible — is equal to all of the other issues in the Church's teachings about “life” and the Church's unyielding insistence on the dignity of life — from conception to natural death. I believe what we do now — each of us — reflects on our moral response to the Church's teachings on life issues.

Some recent projections are that the death toll from the virus will be so tragic and disheartening by the time we reach August.

It is my most earnest hope that everyone in our diocesan family will respond with kindness, patience, understanding, and charity as we return to opportunities we have to

celebrate the Eucharist — which is a total gift. Gifts are not earned or deserved. May we all give thanks when we can receive this gift again.

I also ask that pastors include in the prayers of the faithful the following petition for the coming weeks:

“That the spirit guide all medical scientists as they work to discover a vaccine to counteract the Coronavirus, we pray to the Lord.”

Be assured of my confidence in our pastors as they engage new ways to make not only Holy Communion but more importantly the celebration of the Eucharist available to as many as possible. I have heard so many stories of how they have accommodated weddings — very down-sized to ten or so people attending, very small private baptisms, and funerals with only the very closest families being able to attend.

I am grateful to our pastors, all of our priests, our deacons, and all in lay ecclesial ministry who have been working so hard these weeks on our behalf.

Be assured of my prayerful remembrance of all in our diocese, with kindest regards,
I am

Sincerely yours,

+ r. r. Estévez

Most Rev. Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine