



“From Darkness to Light: Hope for a New Pentecost”

A Pastoral Reflection



THE MOST REVEREND PAUL J. BRADLEY
BISHOP OF KALAMAZOO

LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL

May 1, 2020 — St. Joseph the Worker



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Alleluia! As we continue in this joyous Easter season we can take comfort that Jesus has conquered sin and death by the power of His self-sacrificing love. We have every reason to rejoice and sing, *Alleluia!*

And we can do so even while continuing to confront the coronavirus, which has dramatically impacted every aspect of our lives. Naturally we all feel a certain amount of uneasiness and many have experienced a true sense of loss. However, as People of Faith we take heart knowing that Jesus is our Living Hope, because His resurrection gives us confidence in knowing that His victory over sin and death means that we too share in His victory. We are not powerless; in fact, with Jesus' grace, we have the power of Jesus' love to overcome all our fears.

Certainly we could all agree that this past Holy Week and our current Easter season is like no other any of us have ever experienced. None of us were able to celebrate the holiest days of our faith in the ways we wanted to do so. But I am so inspired by, and profoundly grateful for, our priests, deacons and countless parish volunteers who almost overnight started live streaming the celebration of the Holy Mass, as well as many other opportunities for virtual prayers. While we were not able to actually be together, we still celebrated to the best of our ability.

*“Jesus, I trust in You.
Have mercy on me,
and on the whole world.”*

How were we able to do what we’ve done so far, and why can we continue to be filled with hope in the midst of this pandemic? Because: ***this is Easter!*** It is the celebration of New Life. It’s the perfect time for renewal. Just like the Apostles.

hiding behind locked doors until the Risen Jesus came to free them, Jesus’ peace unlocks our hearts and frees us from the control of fear. And just as Jesus’ peace and mercy were given to the Apostles on Easter Sunday night, making them the “agents of His Mercy” to the world, so too, along with St. Faustina the Patron Saint of “Divine Mercy” we too can say: *“Jesus, I trust in You. Have mercy on me, and on the whole world.”* Even with the restrictions of the “Stay Home, Stay Safe” order which has now been extended at least until mid-May, we too are called to embrace the mission that Jesus gave to those same Apostles, and which He now shares with us: to allow Jesus’ breath of the Holy Spirit that He breathes upon us to make us also His “agents of mercy” to all.

Despite all our fears, challenges, and making adjustments to our new reality, I am hopeful that when this historic pandemic is over, we will emerge from this time truly renewed in Christ: stronger in our faith with *a new perspective*; more aware of who we are as members of the Body of Christ; more deeply yearning for the Gift of the Eucharist; and more determined to move forward in our faith, while embracing the mission of the Eucharist to serve God and our neighbor.



A NEW PERSPECTIVE



I hope for a perspective similar to what Pope Francis described in his homily for Divine Mercy Sunday, *“Now, while we are looking forward to a slow and arduous recovery from the pandemic, there is a danger that we will forget those who are left behind....the risk that we may then be struck by an even worse virus.”* While it may be hard for us to imagine any virus worse than the coronavirus, our Holy Father went on to explain that the virus he was talking about is: *“The virus of selfish indifference.”* As our Holy Father warns, this is the reality of sin which *“begins with selfishness and ends up selecting one person over another, discarding the poor, and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress.”*

Let us join with Pope Francis, praying for the new perspective which helps us to see *“that there are no differences or borders between those who suffer — we are all frail, all equal, all precious.”*

A DEEPER AWARENESS



My vision as we move forward in hope includes a sincere desire that we can take what we have learned from this time of challenge and use it to deepen our awareness of the things that matter most in our lives. We have all had a rude awakening over the past few months as a deadly virus has swept through our world. Many have died. Many more are sick, lonely, unemployed or afraid of what may happen to them. I pray that the hardships we have endured during the past few months have taught us how precious human life is, how blessed we are with family, friends and neighbors, and how important it is to cherish and protect the dignity of human life.

Despite the great loss that we have experienced, and the world-wide suffering this awful COVID-19 has caused, I believe there may also have been some positive outcomes. From my observations, besides being concerned about ourselves and our own families, I think I have seen more of a genuine concern for others' well-being. There definitely appears to be a greater sense of compassion for people's suffering everywhere. We seem to be more aware that we are part of the human family, because what is affecting us, is affecting everyone, everywhere. There's much more conversation about ways we can help one another and a greater awareness of our own, vulnerable human nature.

So, while we all definitely look forward to the end of this pandemic, an end to all the restrictions, and getting back to some normalcy, including being able to come together to celebrate our faith and receive the Eucharist, I hope we will see a new reality. I pray that we will not return to attitudes that divide us; but rather that we continue focusing on what unites us. I pray that we don't go back to thinking practicing our faith is unimportant; but rather that more people will find their way back to God, praying for God's guidance, strength and deliverance.

I hope that we don't return to an attitude of "looking out for Number 1"; rather that the tremendous examples of heroic generosity of true acts of self-sacrifice that we have seen in the courageous healthcare workers, first responders, employees in essential services and volunteers who have given themselves unselfishly for the good of others, will continue to be a priority for all of us. Let us make sure that we express our deep appreciation for the great work done by so many generous and caring people including our dedicated educators, our tireless parents and all those tending to our precious children.

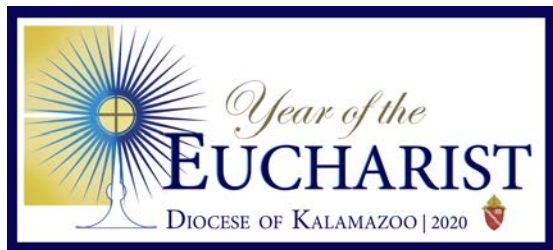


THE YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST



As you know we are currently observing a very special diocesan **Year of the Eucharist**. None of us ever dreamed that during this year when we anticipated a deeper love for and celebration of the Holy Eucharist, that most of us would be without the Body and Blood of Christ for an extended period of time. In normal circumstances, we are so blessed with the regular availability of Mass and the sacraments, unlike in other parts of the world; now, because we have been deprived of this Precious Gift, perhaps we can value the Eucharist even more, see it as the amazing privilege that it is, and recognize it as a blessing from Jesus. May we never take the Eucharist for granted again. And so I pray that when we do resume public celebrations of the liturgy, that we will do so with a renewed devotion to the Real Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. I also pray for a renewed appreciation for the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) as the most effective means of freeing us from the debilitating effects of sin, as Pope Francis referred to it, a virus that is worse than the coronavirus, which does such great harm to our souls.

When we emerge from this pandemic, **the Year of the Eucharist** will continue to offer us wonderful opportunities to have a revitalized sense of what it means for us to be in “communion” with our Saving Lord and with each other. Jesus gives Himself to us completely in this Most Holy Sacrament. My prayer is that we can return to Him with a renewed sense of gratitude and with a deeper commitment to serve all God’s people.



The Eucharist calls us to mission, not just to love one another through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, but also to be missionary disciples, joyfully sharing the Good News. This is truly what *evangelization* means. By necessity during this pandemic, we have had to learn how to make better use of digital media to proclaim the Gospel. As things return to normal, we need to expand our outreach at all levels: diocesan, parish, and through individual families, so that we continue becoming true evangelizers, committed to carrying Christ’s message to everyone we meet.

PENTECOST: OUR HEARTS ARE RENEWED

In just a few weeks, this year's Easter Season will culminate, as it always does, with the Solemnity of Pentecost, "the Birthday of the Church". Even though the Apostles and early Disciples, who had been traumatized by Jesus' awful suffering, death and burial, and who, in the days following Easter, eventually came to the realization that their beloved Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead, gloriously triumphant, it was not until the Holy Spirit so powerfully came upon them at Pentecost that they became re-born in the Holy Spirit, empowered, emboldened, and inspired to take up the mission Jesus had given them. They began to preach boldly, and to proclaim the Good News of the Risen Jesus to any, and all, who would listen. It was



not only their passionate proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus fueled by the Holy Spirit, but it was also their own witness to the teachings of Jesus that was so convincing. The Acts of the Apostles records that thousands of people at a time responded by being baptized, and becoming joyful disciples of Jesus. The early Church grew exponentially, and spread literally like wildfire in spite of, and perhaps even because of, the suffering and intense persecutions that were mounted against them, and the great challenges that they personally endured for their faith.

My dear Family of Faith, my hope and prayer is that despite the traumatic period of time through which we have been living, we will allow that same Holy Spirit, who filled the hearts of the first Apostles and turned them from fearful followers into fearless witnesses in the first generation of the Church, to

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change our hearts and transform us from passive participants to active promoters of our faith in our own generation of the Church here in southwest Michigan. I pray that we no longer take our faith for granted; I pray that our weekly attendance at Mass in whatever way we are able to do so — in person when we can come back to Church or virtually for those who for a time may have to rely on that — and the

regular reception of the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Penance and the reception of the Eucharist, will be our new normal. I pray that our celebration of Pentecost this year will be a time when each of us — me, all our priests, deacons, lay faithful from oldest to youngest — will personally invite the Holy Spirit to renew us, as He did the first Apostles, and empower and embolden us to be joyful disciples and effective witnesses to the Risen Jesus in our lives. Just as the first Apostles and disciples were effective not only by their inspired preaching but through the way they lived their faith with such conviction, may it be true for each of us. We can draw others to Jesus by the ways we live our lives as people of vibrant faith, who love God and love our neighbor, especially those most in need.

That's why we launched the "Let Jesus' Light Shine" campaign to remind us throughout this 50 day season of the "Light of the World" even when dealing with darkness.

It is important to note that during this time of crisis, lockdown, and quarantines, the ministries of the Church and outreach to those in need have not been restricted or put on hold. In fact, our parishes continue to be Centers of Hope. Most of our churches have remained open and our Eucharistic Adoration Chapels have as well, available for our people to come for personal prayer. Several parishes have hosted blood drives, and maintained their outreach to the poor. Catholic Charities Diocese of Kalamazoo initiated a major, diocesan-wide Emergency Food Program (www.ccdok.org), with staff and hundreds of volunteers from across the diocese working overtime to provide essential services — including food, clothing and other necessities — to people in need throughout southwest Michigan. We must al-



Photo by: Tony Dugal

ways strive to care for those chronically on the margins, as well as those who may find themselves temporarily there due to adverse life circumstances caused by the pandemic. We want to provide a safety net for people who might otherwise fall through the cracks in the public safety net.



To assist our parishes to keep some semblance of financial stability during this time, we have instituted a special program called *Forward in Faith: The Parish Support Fund*. This is a fund established by the Diocese to provide financial relief for parishes during this crisis by means of online giving. [For more information about this fund, please go to www.diokzoo.org/parish-fund.]

To allow parishioners to concentrate on parish support, *The Bishop's Annual Appeal*, which supports essential diocesan ministries, will be rescheduled for later in the year. As I have said many times before, strong Parishes make a strong Diocese and we are working to ensure our Parishes are financially secure.

Although we have been forced to change the way we have been providing our ministries, our mission remains the same. We are committed to proclaiming the Gospel, to prayer and worship, to lifelong faith formation, and to serving the needs of all God's people.

Due to the fact that many Confirmations and Parish Collaborative visits, as well as other diocesan gatherings which had been scheduled during this time, we have had to postpone all of them to a later date. In consultation with our priests and deacons, we will thoroughly and thoughtfully create appropriate guidelines for the protection of all people while also mindful of ways we can continue to provide spiritual and pastoral care.



Sundays @ 10 a.m. with
BISHOP PAUL J. BRADLEY
Daily @ 8 a.m. with
Msgr. Michael Osborn

Livestreamed on our Facebook and
diokzoo.org/live.
For a list of parishes with live Masses, visit
diokzoo.org/live



MASS OF THANKSGIVING



The first thing that we will schedule as soon as we resume our public worship in the Diocese of Kalamazoo is a diocesan Mass of Thanksgiving. While I do not know what that date is at this time, this special Mass will allow us to give thanks to God for His protection and His abiding Presence with us throughout this time. At this Mass we will also take the occasion to distrib-

ute the Holy Oils which I blessed/consecrated during our Chrism Mass on Holy Tuesday. This special Mass of Thanksgiving will be an opportunity to bring together our priests, deacons and our Lay Faithful in a prayerful expression of our thanks to God for the blessings we continue to receive here in southwest Michigan.



Photo by: John Grap

ENTRUSTING OUR DIOCESE TO MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH



The month of May is traditionally dedicated to special devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary. This year, I think this is especially appropriate. On this first day of May, I joined with all the Bishops of the United States, at the invitation of Archbishop Jose H. Gomez, the President of the USCCB, to reconsecrate all the dioceses in our country to the protection of our Blessed Mother. When it first became apparent that the deadly coronavirus pandemic threatened millions of people throughout the world, Pope Francis immediately turned to Mary, Health of the Sick. He implored her to intercede for us and to help all who suffer from this modern day plague find comfort and hope in the healing power of her Son, Jesus.

Following is one of our Holy Father's prayers to Mary during this troubled time. It is the text of an ancient Marian hymn, *Sub Tuum Praesidium* (*Beneath Thy Protection*):

*We seek refuge under your protection,
O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas –
we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger,
O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.*



Recently Pope Francis has encouraged all individuals and families to pray the Rosary daily during the month of May to ask for our Blessed Mother's special protection and care during this pandemic. Please consider continuing or starting this beautiful practice. As our Holy Father said, "contemplating the face of Christ with the heart of Mary our Mother will make us even more united as a spiritual family and will help us overcome this time of trial".

While in some way we look forward to a return to a time of normalcy, we all know that we will never be quite the same. May Mary, the Mother of the Church, and the Mother of God, bless our Diocese, and all the people we serve, with her compassion and her courage. May she inspire us to avoid returning to business as usual, but rather that we embrace the mission of her Son Jesus, to move forward in hope. May Saint Joseph the Worker, the foster father of Jesus and the Husband of Mary, whose Feast we celebrate today, continue to be the Protector of our Church. May all that we have experienced lead us to a profound renewal of our faith in God, of our hope in a better life to come, and of our ability to love God and our neighbor by living the mission of the Eucharist.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Paul J. Bradley

The Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo