



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF SCRANTON
300 WYOMING AVENUE
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18503-1279

July 15, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For more than a year, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unique challenges in our lives. It has brought hardship and struggle to some – separation, anxiety and isolation to others. We pray for those who have been directly affected by the virus, those that are still impacted by its effects and those who have lost loved ones.

Since March 2020, there has been a dispensation in the Diocese of Scranton from the obligation to participate at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. In light of the continued decline in cases and hospitalizations locally, that dispensation will end on Sunday, August 15, 2021, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This change will occur in each diocese in Pennsylvania on the same date.

The Sunday celebration of Mass is the center of the Church's life. The importance – and necessity – to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is rooted in our Baptism as Christians. Baptism compels us, as Christians, to unite ourselves with Christ at the altar in his saving Sacrifice of the Cross. Put simply, attending Mass is an encounter with Our Risen Lord.

This is a moment to thank God anew for the great gift of the Mass and the Real Presence of Jesus to us in His Holy Body and Blood as well as the joy of gathering together as people of faith.

As Pope Francis reminded us in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus." Long before we knew a pandemic was on the horizon, the Holy Father reminded us the Sunday encounter gives us the strength to experience the present with confidence and courage and to go forth with hope.

I invite and encourage all of the faithful in our community – including those who may have left the Church long before the pandemic – to return to the Table of the Lord – and be nourished by the Bread of Life! Our participation at Mass in-person is a gift for our own spiritual well-being, happiness and eternal salvation. It is also our responsibility to our brothers and sisters with whom we journey in faith.

It is important to note that people who are seriously ill or have a serious health risk, as well as those who have significant fear or anxiety of being part of a large group will continue to be legitimately excused from participating in Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. Those individuals are still encouraged to spend time in prayer, meditating on the Death and Resurrection of the Lord, reading Sacred Scripture and uniting themselves to Christ in his worship of the Father of us all.

Please continue to pray for all of our clergy and religious – who work tirelessly to make sure our parish communities remain safe and vibrant!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Scranton