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**DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA**  
**OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**

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May 18, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we rejoice in our Easter Faith, my prayer is that the new life we have in Christ will bring you and your family hope and comfort. The Coronavirus has brought numerous challenges. Our common efforts to mitigate the disease have asked us to sacrifice and adjust to new realities for the good of all. United in Christ, we continue to face the present difficulties with courage and compassion. So many have persevered in faith and charity and our Parishes have remained beacons of God's love and grace. For this, I am profoundly grateful to God and to the Priests and Faithful of the Diocese of Venice.

After much prayer and discernment and having consulted with the priests on the Presbyteral Council, it has been determined that public celebration of the Mass in the Diocese of Venice can resume. Therefore, I am announcing that the celebration of Holy Mass with a congregation present, will begin on May 18, 2020 and moving forward. All other non-liturgical activities at Parishes remain suspended until it is determined that these activities can safely resume; thank you for your understanding on this point.

Out of concern for the safety of all involved, our Pastors have been asked to follow established directives and guidelines. These limit the size of the congregation to 50% of occupancy, maintain social distancing guidance, and ask the Faithful's cooperation to wear facemasks and bring with them hand sanitizer for their use. The Faithful are also asked to receive communion in the hand. These are extraordinary times and I ask for your patience and good will as Parishes reopen for public celebrations. Further, schedules may need to be adjusted and some Priests or liturgical ministers may not be able to participate publicly because of age or health conditions.

As Parish churches reopen for Mass, I remind those who are at greater risk or anxious about returning at this time, that the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in effect until June 28, 2020. Parishes have been asked to continue livestreaming until the dispensation is lifted. The Faithful ought not to worry about remaining home if they are concerned for their wellbeing or that of other parishioners. Of course, those who are sick or have symptoms associated with COVID-19 are to stay home.

The Faithful of the Diocese of Venice have remained resolute in their faith during these unprecedented times, vibrantly expressing their Spiritual Communion with Christ and His Church. Still, I am aware that there is a hunger for the Eucharist. My prayerful hope is that, strengthened by the Bread come down from Heaven, you will emerge from these times with stronger faith. As we return to Holy Mass, let us with the psalmist, raise our voices in praise of God: *I rejoiced when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."*

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Frank J. Dewane  
Bishop of the Diocese of  
Venice in Florida