



DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO

McRaith Catholic Center | *Office of the Bishop*

April 14, 2021

Wednesday of the 2nd Week of Easter

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May you and your families know the peace and joy of the risen Jesus!

Many times over the last 14 months I have commented that it seems like the Lent that began in 2020 is still with us – 40 days plus 400 days. What an unusual and difficult year this has been for each one of us. One year ago, none of us could have known the loss and the challenges that were heading our way as a result of the pandemic. Over this past year, we have experienced the terrible loss of human life, loss of jobs, loss of a sense of security, of being physically present with our families and others we love, and the loss of gathering with our parish communities for the celebration of the Eucharist.

On March 16, 2020, for the protection and safety of all, as bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro I suspended the public celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Before that time, it was inconceivable to me that such a thing could be required. For two months throughout most of the United States, there were no public Eucharistic celebrations. While we were able to return to the public celebration of the Holy Eucharist on May 20, 2020, it was with limited occupancy and other preventative measures prescribed by the State of Kentucky, and with the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass still in place. One year later, the dispensation and restrictions remain in effect.

I am most grateful to you for understanding that all precautions have been taken out of an abundance of caution and even more so out of an abundance of Christian charity in an effort to protect the most vulnerable. We, as Christians, have a duty towards our neighbors to act for the sake of the common good. It is right, therefore, to respect public health and safety regulations regarding our churches. The good news is that they appear to be working. To my knowledge, we have not experienced a single transmission of COVID-19 at Eucharistic celebrations in any of our 78 parishes.

It has been a year of fasting, and it is fitting in this Easter season that we are starting to see signs of hope. More people are vaccinated every day, bringing us closer to the time when the world can open up again. The medical community has made great strides in understanding the virus and they are now better able to prevent it, to diagnose it and to treat it. Governor Andy Beshear recently announced that he will remove capacity restrictions and physical distancing requirements when 2.5 million Kentuckians have received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Despite these positive trends, the pandemic is not yet over. For that reason, the dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation remains in place. It is counterproductive to tell the community that we are all again obligated to attend Mass when we literally cannot accommodate them in accord with prevailing restrictions. There remain restrictions on our public worship: churches limited to 60% occupancy, the wearing of face masks, and physical distancing are still required.

I know you are tired, but I ask for your continued patience. I know you are aching for all of those things from which you have had to fast for over a year now. I share in your fatigue. I long for the day when everyone can return to the celebration of the Eucharist – the source and summit of our Christian life where we are nourished by both God’s Word and the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ – when we can fill our churches with song and praise the Lord with our voices. However, we have not yet arrived at that moment. For now, we must continue to do what is necessary to protect the common good.

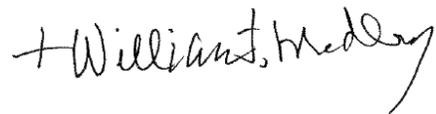
I am so very grateful to the priests of the Diocese of Owensboro for their perseverance and hard work in these months. They have been working diligently in these strange circumstances to do what they can to keep parish life alive. Please join me in encouraging them and praying for them.

I am grateful as well to each of you. Not only have you abided by the masking and distancing restrictions placed upon all of us, but I’ve heard many accounts of ways in which you have loved and supported one another this past year. No act of charity directed toward our neighbor is too small. “They will know we are Christians by our love.” Thank you for your Christian witness.

Our communities have endured much during this pandemic. I pray that this Easter season will bring you hope, joy, and a renewed vigor to stay the course for a bit longer. In this year of Saint Joseph, we pray for his intercession for an end to the pandemic, for healing for the sick, for comfort for those who mourn, and for the perseverance of us all.

I keep each of you in my prayers, and I humbly ask that you remember me in prayer as well.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William F. Medley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Most Reverend William F. Medley
Bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro