



**Office of the Bishop**  
*Diocese of Brooklyn*

310 Prospect Park West  
Brooklyn, New York 11215

May 1, 2020  
St. Joseph the Worker

To the Faithful of the Diocese in Brooklyn & Queens:

As you read this letter, we are in the midst of the Easter Season. We rejoice in the risen Jesus and in what that Resurrection means for us who are members of His Body. By His Cross and Resurrection, Christ has set us free.

Yet, as much as we believe and rejoice in that Paschal mystery, we are celebrating in a very difficult and challenging time. Our observance of Lent this year was marked by unexpected and unwelcome penances for which we did not ask. Easter is marred by the same. We always trust in Jesus and His promise to be with us always and His command to us not to fear.

The pandemic we are experiencing has done many things. It has, first of all, taken from us some of our loved ones. Many of us have experienced the suffering of so many sick people. At the same time we have also seen the strength and resilience of many of our first responders, doctors, nurses and other medical personnel, and so many more who are considered to be essential workers. This has moved us to feel and express a gratitude which we perhaps should have expressed previously. So we mourn our beloved dead, we continue to pray for the sick among us and we thank those who help bravely.

Our spiritual lives have changed, too. We have experienced the closure of our churches. How painful this is to us, who feel that the Church is a “second home” in so many ways. We have been unable to receive the sacraments. I am thinking most especially of the Sacrament of Penance and Eucharist.

Please allow me to reflect on that for a moment. The sacraments are indeed the way that Jesus chose to remain in our lives and the way that we continue to experience His presence and work among us. Nothing can replace that for us. It is most especially true in the Eucharist where Jesus is truly and substantially present to us that we experience Him in a unique and irreplaceable way. However, this experience has also taught us that Jesus cannot be limited. He cannot be contained. We can and do experience Him in many different ways. A sincere Act of Contrition and a Spiritual Communion, while not replacements for the sacraments, are ways to allow Jesus into our lives. We have even been unable to mourn our dead in the ways we are accustomed to doing. While this is heart breaking, we know that God’s mercy is overwhelming and we can pray for our loved ones at all times.

The closing of our churches has been unavoidable, as Brooklyn and Queens has had nearly 60% of all cases of Covid-19 in New York City. Though there are many who doubt and even publicly speak out against the decisions made to close churches and maintain social distancing, please know that decisions like these have not been taken lightly, especially in this Diocese where Brooklyn and Queens are literally at the epicenter of the crisis in New York City, which is the epicenter of the United States. We have had to resort to these desperate measures to prevent the further loss of life and spread of disease. Life is God's great gift and we must protect it.

That is why our churches will remain closed until it is safe to reopen them, a decision that will be made by Diocese of Brooklyn with the assistance of Mr. Joseph Esposito (former Commissioner of the Office of Emergency Management for New York City) in conjunction with public health authorities. When our churches do reopen, unfortunately, we **will not** be able to resume church life as we enjoyed it before. There will be changes to keep everyone healthy and safe. We will respond as always, as faithful People of God, to the challenges placed before us. I ask that we all strive to understand, to adapt and to rise up to these challenges.

I want to thank our priests and deacons who have learned new ways to minister to you: for streamed Masses and retreats, homilies and talks, and various other engaging events on line which all help us remain close as the parish families we are and keep our spirits lifted as joy-filled Christians.

We continue to pray for our beloved dead, may they rest in peace; and we pray for the sick that they will experience the presence of Christ the Healer; for our governmental leaders; for our dedicated first responders, doctors, nurses, medical personnel, funeral directors, and essential workers; for the clergy and religious of our Diocese and for us all. May the Lord, who is Mercy Itself, lead us out of this difficult time and into a time of good health and new life.

The month of May is dedicated in a particular way to our Blessed Mother. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has asked us to pray the Rosary most fervently this month for an end to this pandemic. We place our trust in the intercession of Mary and of her blessed spouse St. Joseph whose feast we celebrate today, May 1<sup>st</sup>. Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us! St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, pray for us!

With an assurance of my continued remembrance of you in prayer, I am

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.  
Bishop of Brooklyn