



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

December 21, 2020

Dear Diocesan Family,

I write you an urgent message after learning that some of the faithful of our Diocese do not feel it safe to attend Holy Mass because some fellow congregants are refusing to wear masks. I find this to be an unacceptable situation and one lacking severely in the Christian virtue of charity for one's neighbor.

How can we safely encourage Catholics to assemble for the Eucharistic celebration in the midst of a pandemic that has infected over 402,270 of our fellow citizens just yesterday and has killed over 28,553 people in New York State alone? I have received many emails and letters with a broad range of advice on how to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. Some suggest to me to disregard all the rhetoric surrounding the coronavirus, while others beg me to curtail public worship until it is safer to gather in larger crowds again.

Perplexing are those who condemn bishops and priests for not being bolder in opening our churches to a fuller capacity; but will not respect the concern and comfort of fellow parishioners who feel we need to follow CDC guidelines and state regulations that assert masks need to be worn in public settings for the common good. These very same proponents of keeping our churches open are driving fellow parishioners away with their refusal to wear a simple mask.

Scientific evidence has shown that wearing face masks reduces the transmission of COVID-19. Despite the controversy over whether to wear one or not, we must realize that as faith-filled Catholics we adhere to the calling of God to care for others. With the increased spread of COVID-19, it is therefore our responsibility to do what we can to limit exposure of this virus and "slow the spread." As a brother bishop recently wrote to his diocesan family, "We need to listen to the Word of God in Philippians 2:4, 'Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.'"

On May 22nd of this year, the Diocese of Syracuse issued instructions and requirements for the resumption of public worship in our parishes. At that time, I directed that **Masks must be worn at Mass** and instructed that all churches in the Diocese of Syracuse (along with those individuals who choose to worship in them) must follow the protocols. I repeat this admonition because it has been proven that churches who have followed the established protocols for safe worship have not contributed to the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. I understand that there may be individuals who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons. Please see your parish priest for a suitable accommodation with the caution that a public gathering could be a threat to your health.

I hope the sharing of this important matter will help alleviate unnecessary anxiety for all those wishing to attend Mass in the parishes of the Diocese of Syracuse. I do not want to keep anyone from receiving the Sacraments, but in this time of soaring infection rates I must instruct that if a person refuses to wear a mask for the sake of other congregants they are not to be permitted in the church for a public gathering.

As we look forward to our Christmas celebrations, know of my continue prayers for you and your loves ones.

In the Name of Jesus,

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia

Bishop of Syracuse

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