



DIOCESE OF PORTLAND OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

June 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the hope that you are enjoying the special beauty of early summer, I write personally to invite you to return to Mass in our Maine churches. What a wonderful feeling it is to be able to write that! Effective the weekend of June 19-20, the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass is reintroduced, another step toward a sense of normalcy and the way of life we treasure. As is always the case, the obligation does not apply to those who have serious reasons for not attending in person.

The celebration of Mass as a community, and the special nature of Sunday as a day on which we give thanks to God for his goodness to us, are central to who we are as Christians and Catholics. It is an ancient practice which is at the heart of our faith. In our gathering for Mass, together we give thanks to God for the gift of salvation and life. We sometimes hear people say that “I am spiritual, but I don’t need to go to church to connect with God.” An isolated faith is not what Jesus intended for his followers. We come to know him through our being together, and together, we bring him with us when we depart from the church to share our faith in him with others.

Our gathering provides the venue where we encounter Jesus Christ in ways that bring true meaning to our lives. Celebrating the Eucharist is the primary place in which we are community. It is the source and summit of our faith. Here Jesus unites us in himself as we receive his body and his blood, and we experience ourselves as Church gathered in Christ. He speaks to us, feeds us, and assures us of his eternal presence. We can only experience his real presence fully when gathered together in the Eucharist.

It has been a long 15 months. We have missed the company of one another. More importantly, I hope we have realized that the loss was not just a case of missing one another, it was the loss of our sense of being Church, of the way in which our gathering as God’s people at Mass is not just a nice way to be together, but it is a sacred duty we have to each other and God. Together we form the Church, and when we worship together at Eucharist, we believe that we will find Jesus in our community.

The diocese has been guided by experts and science in making decisions throughout the pandemic. We have acted with caution and continue to do so. Our use of vaccinations has grown

sufficiently to allow us to safely reopen and gratefully welcome people back in our places of worship. There is no substitution to experiencing Christ in person in the Mass.

Please take this invitation to heart. Help those in your life who are hesitant to return to understand why they should come back. Remember you can always find updated Mass times and church addresses on the diocesan website (www.portlanddiocese.org). At the website, you can also view the livestreamed Mass schedules which will be helpful for those who are vulnerable, ill themselves, or caring for such a person. These individuals can still excuse themselves from in-person worship, as has always been the case.

In the words of Pope Francis, when we joyfully gather, exchanging smiles and sharing in our faith, the Church becomes “a large and welcoming room where everyone can enter and meet the Lord.” I look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely yours in Christ our Hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert P. Deeley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, J.C.D.
Bishop of Portland