



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Lent 2022

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

After two years of enduring the many trials of a pandemic, it seems that the end is in sight. On March 1st a number of significant restrictions will be lifted and things can begin to return to normal. Capacity limits and physical distancing requirements at places of worship will end; however, masks are still required until directed otherwise by government officials. This is good news indeed for parish life.

Throughout the pandemic, I have dispensed individuals from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of obligation. As things improve, it is my hope to end this dispensation on Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022. This will be done in anticipation of the great feast celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday.

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. It is providential that this is the day after the restrictions are being lifted in Ontario. It provides us with a wonderful opportunity to help those who have been away from our parishes during the pandemic to 'return home.' For some, this will not be easy due to fear or hesitation. Others may have become comfortable watching live-streamed Mass at home. The challenge will be to draw these people back to the Sunday Eucharist. Jesus shows us the way.

On the Road to Emmaus the disciples were discouraged and confused. They had fear in their hearts and were uncertain of their future. When they encountered the Risen Lord all of that changed. Jesus accompanied them on the road and eventually he led them to the Eucharist. We are told that in the 'breaking of the bread' their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus.

I am asking that throughout the Lenten season parishes embrace a simple theme, "Welcome Home to the Mass." Make the effort to reach out to those you know who have not been at Mass throughout the pandemic. Invite them to "come home" and then, like the Risen Jesus, accompany them to the 'breaking of the bread.' Here they will recognize the Lord and receive hope and healing.

During Lent we embrace the three traditional pillars of prayer, fasting and almsgiving as a means of spiritual transformation. This year, I ask that you add to these a simple desire to bring as many people as possible to Christ in the Eucharist. Offer this simple invitation: 'Welcome home to the Mass' and the Lord will do the rest.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.
Bishop of St. Catharines