



Diocesan Centre
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Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS
Bishop of
Diocese of Motherwell

15th July 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I join with your Parish Priests in welcoming you back to the public celebration of Holy Mass this weekend. While offering warm greetings to those present at Mass, I extend my prayers and good wishes to those not able to come, particularly those still shielding and those anxious about sharing enclosed spaces with others. Our prayers at Mass today are for all members of our parish communities, especially the most vulnerable. Our dear ones and fellow parishioners who have passed away over the last four months are very much in our prayers also, and we ask the Lord's consolation for all who grieve their loss. Many people therefore to hold in our prayer and commend to God's mercy and protection.

Although many of you have followed the live-streamed Masses and have greatly appreciated being able to do so, there has been a growing desire to get back to Mass, to be physically present with others in the Body of Christ, and to receive again the Body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Four months without receiving Holy Communion must have been a very long fast for many of you, so I hope that in receiving the Lord sacramentally today you will feel richly blessed by his consoling and loving presence and renewed in your desire to serve him faithfully in his Body, the Church. The Eucharistic fast endured through these months makes us more aware of the hardships and trials of our fellow Catholics for whom long periods without Mass and reception of Holy Communion are the norm – those living under persecution, those without priests, those working in places with no access to Mass. We thank God in the Mass for his goodness and salvation and pray that we may be preserved from harm, particularly from any further outbreaks of the virus which has brought such disruption to our world.

Our politicians have often thanked us for the sacrifices made in order to control the spread of the virus and to keep us all safe. In the Mass we participate in the Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, and celebrate the Mystery of his Death and Resurrection, through which we are saved. In returning to the public celebration of Holy Mass, more strongly aware of the sacrifices we have made personally and as families, I ask that we seek a renewed appreciation of the Mass and our union with Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, in his self-offering to the Father. Through this deep spiritual participation in the Mass we feel the strength and blessing of the Lord's abiding presence with us, especially in all that we are called upon to do and accept in our daily lives. We are asked at present to keep the celebration of Mass simple and brief but that does not mean any lessening of the essential mystery we celebrate in the Liturgy of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and our grateful thanks for such a wonderful gift.

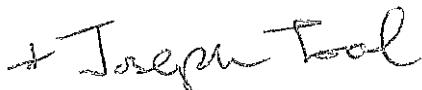
I am assured that all our churches have been able to reopen in recent weeks and people have come to pray in them as we awaited the decision to allow public worship. I thank those who have continued their weekly contributions to their parishes through the lockdown, but am aware that a strong effort will be necessary now on the part of all parishioners to help in the recovery from the inevitable financial losses incurred while the churches have been closed. Great sacrifices were made in building our churches across the Diocese and successive generations of parishioners have looked after them well and contributed generously to support their parishes, the Diocese and wider Church. Your continued generous support for the Church will be greatly appreciated at this time of recovery. The general economic climate has greatly deteriorated, so it seems inevitable that this will affect the Church also, but as Scottish Catholics have been resilient before, particularly in the Lanarkshire towns and villages, hopefully that spirit and goodwill towards the Church will sustain us into the future.

Thinking about the future I would encourage parents to bring their children back to church. It will be good for the younger generations to see that the churches are open again, before the schools even, and they are very welcome at Mass. The shorter Masses, without singing, may have some appeal for teenagers! We have missed most of the sacramental celebrations due to the lockdown so we will need to address this when possible. The present limit on numbers attending does make planning difficult, but hopefully further repression of the virus and a successful return to school will allow First Communions and Confirmations to be arranged later this year. Here again though, the sacrifices of recent months and the struggle to get through difficult times does allow for a change of mood and perspective and a stronger awareness of the beautiful spiritual gifts our children, and indeed all of us, receive in the sacraments.

On behalf of you all, I would like to express a word of appreciation to the priests and deacons across the Diocese for their faithful ministry through these months, and to those who assisted them. Thanks to those who took on new initiatives, especially in assisting the needy and isolated in our communities. I thank all who have responded to the call for volunteers in recent weeks and for your willingness to continue this service as public worship returns. On behalf of the Church, I thank all who work in the Health and Care Services and all essential workers, whose contribution to our health and so many other needs through these difficult times has been so outstanding. May the Lord's blessing be with you all.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Joseph Toal". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+ Joseph Toal