



DIOCESE OF GAYLORD

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March 19, 2020
Solemnity of St. Joseph

Dear Brother Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Administrators, Religious and Faithful:

I continue to pray for all those in our beloved Diocese of Gaylord, throughout our state and nation, and throughout the world. I recognize what a challenging time this is, as we are not able to publicly attend Mass for the time being, and that there are questions and concerns as to what this means for our journey of faith, both individually and as the Church.

As I shared in my message on March 13, 2020, the novel coronavirus continues to ramp up with increasing health risks to the general population throughout our country and state. It has been necessary to make some difficult decisions to do our part in stemming the spread of this pernicious virus. Doing the difficult part now, I pray, will reduce the time and impact this virus will have on the vulnerable people in our congregations and communities; being concerned about the welfare of those who are sick and vulnerable is an act of charity that will not be forgotten.

I am sincerely thankful for all concerns about this temporary measure, because it reflects our collective faith that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life — the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Additionally, it reflects our understanding that God desires us to be in relationship and communion with one another. Be assured—these beliefs are not weakened by these temporary measures. Christ is still among us, and we can, and should, still continue our journey of faith even during such times.

Although *public* Mass is suspended for this time, please know that priests throughout our diocese are still privately celebrating the Mass each day, insofar as they are able, for the intentions already determined for your parish. Additionally, confession and anointing of the sick continue as we are able. In short, faith formation endures!

During this season of Lent, we are invited to draw near to God through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and although these acts of faith may look different this particular Lenten season, *this is still our call*. I remind you that **there is a dispensation for not attending Mass during this time**. However, it is highly encouraged that all would make a spiritual communion during this time, and if possible, do so while celebrating the Mass through resources such as television, social media, or listening via the radio. There is a developing list of such opportunities on our website, one that we are working diligently to update often. May these resources equip you to continue with faith formation within your homes and families.

This is also an excellent time to engage with the Lord in different forms, perhaps even ones that are new for you. These acts of faith could include making a Holy Hour; praying the Rosary, the Magnificat

or the Stations of the Cross; reflecting on the daily readings; finding time to spend at your parish praying before the Holy Eucharist; or utilizing programs such as FORMED. Prayers can be offered for those who are affected by the pandemic, for those in the medical community treating patients and for wisdom in our scientific community.

Today on this Solemnity of St. Joseph, the protector of families and the Church, Pope Francis invites each of us to accompany him and our brothers and sisters around the world in praying the Rosary (Luminous Mysteries) together at 4:00 p.m. (EDT). All of these forms of devotion and prayer will help us traverse this uncertain time together, as the Body of Christ.

We remember Jesus' trial in the desert for forty days, a time of fasting and spiritual communion with the Father. It was this wilderness time that, ultimately, led to His glorious resurrection and victory over death — the anchor of our hope! Likewise, let us not be disheartened during this temporary "desert," but let us instead find renewed fervor in our faith and continued longing for the joy that is to come.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steven J. Raica". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Steven J Raica
Bishop of Gaylord