



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

May 20, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ:

The Acts of the Apostles begins with the Ascension of the Lord to the right hand of the Father's throne in heaven. Luke described the scene of Jesus being lifted up, "a cloud took him from their sight." (Acts 1.1-11) The lingering, longing look of the disciples' gaze fixed on the sky revealed their sense of loss. Their master had seemingly left them behind. As they stared up at the sky, two angels came to chastise the gloomy group. "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?" The followers of Jesus were reminded that the Lord Jesus would return. With these words of encouragement, the disciples returned to Jerusalem. The scripture tells us, "All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus." (Acts. 1.14)

The cloud of the COVID-19 pandemic has hidden from our sight the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Lord Jesus offered in the Sacrifice of the Mass. We miss contemplating His closeness to us. We hunger to hear His merciful words entrusting Himself to us. We yearn with open hands and hearts to receive His most precious body and blood. Like those disciples in the Acts of the Apostles our gaze lingers with longing over the empty churches with silent altars waiting to fill our souls with the presence of the Risen Lord. I have much admiration and gratitude for all those who have "devoted themselves with one accord to prayer" with one another and with Mary, the mother of Jesus. The words of Jesus which conclude the gospel of Matthew give us confidence in our prayerful vigil, "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt. 28.20)

We have endured a long Lenten Season that was more penitential than expected. The Easter Season continues to test Christian patience. This has been a spiritual journey that has tried everyone's faith. The Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, continues to assure us. Do not be afraid. With His rod and His staff, He will lead us through the "valley of the shadow of death". He will soon set a table before us.

The difficult precautions intended to stop the spread of the coronavirus have been prudent and necessary measures. Lives have been saved and the health of many, especially the most vulnerable, have been safeguarded. This effort is still not over. Justifiable fears linger. Continued calls for caution should be heeded. The sacrifices made by those who have been afflicted and those who care for them, especially health care workers, should be honored by our sustained vigilance.

My brother priests and I are preparing to resume the public celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass. The date for lifting the suspension of public Masses has not been set but there are reasonable hopes that it will be soon. Much depends on the prudent, practical, personal

measures each of us takes to maintain physical-distancing and other hygienic precautions. Returning to the Table of the Lord will incorporate these measures so that both the health as well as the holiness of the faithful can be nurtured. The steps to be taken have been outlined in the presentation, “Coming Back to the Table”. Please review this material. Prepare yourself both physically and spiritually for coming together around the Lord’s altar of sacrifice.

Join me, Bishop Weigand, and my brother priests in praying for the Lord’s mercy to end the pandemic. The sacrifices we make and sufferings we endure unite us ever more closely to the one saving sacrifice of Christ. May the Lord of tender mercies purify us and prepare us to receive the Bread of Life more worthily.

Holy Mary, mother of mercy and mother of the Church, pray with us and for us.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jaime Soto", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

+Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento