



March 17, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

It saddens me to share this with you, but I have decided to suspend all public Masses in the Diocese of Erie effective Wednesday, March 18 until further notice.

This is not a decision I wanted to make; nor did I make it lightly. But given the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is an important decision made for the good of the community, especially the most vulnerable among us.

We are working to make a number of resources available for the faithful, some of which I will share with you in this letter. But first, in the midst of this challenging moment, I want to provide you with spiritual encouragement and strength.

It is understandable that people are feeling overwhelmed — there's so much uncertainty in our lives in the face of this pandemic, something we have never experienced. In recent days, our lives have changed considerably. Families are scrambling to figure out how they are going to address the needs of children who are suddenly no longer leaving the house to go to school. Many of us are not allowed to visit elderly relatives who are in nursing homes. It's difficult not to wonder what additional limitations may be imposed at any given moment.

We are all human, and our concerns are natural. We can't help but worry about how we will navigate these changes in our lives. In addition to those whose health is at risk, I am particularly concerned for those whose livelihoods will be compromised for what could be a significant period of time.

There is no better time to grow in our faith than in a moment of trial. While the stress is real, our faith teaches us to trust in the Lord. "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him," Jesus said, just before he gave us the Lord's Prayer.

Even though public Masses have been suspended, I want to assure you every priest in the diocese will continue to offer a private Mass each day. I have asked that they remember the intentions of their parishioners at each Mass; that will be my intention as well.



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In addition, we each still have an obligation to "keep holy the Sabbath." Please give serious consideration as to how you will accomplish this, particularly throughout Holy Week and Easter. I am asking families to worship together in their homes each Sunday. Our website will have a link to the readings for Sunday Mass, and we expect to livestream a Mass from St. Peter Cathedral in Erie, the mother church of the diocese, each Sunday morning. Please reference www.ErieRCD.org for final details, including the time. I have every confidence the Lord will bless us as we find new and creative ways to welcome him into our lives.

I have asked pastors to keep their churches open for visitation as much as possible. Many parishes will offer Exposition so people will be able to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, even if it must be done while remaining an acceptable distance away from others. We also will soon publish information about how baptisms, reconciliation, confirmation, weddings, anointings and funerals will be handled in the coming weeks and months.

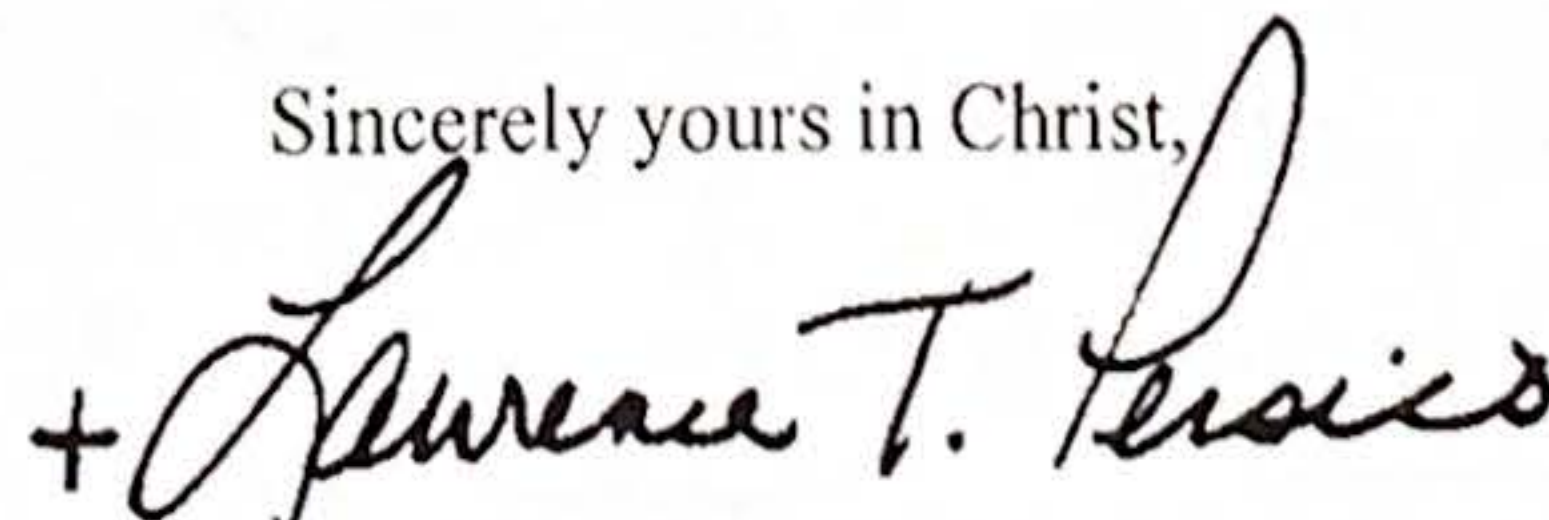
There are many Scripture verses that can help us, and we have begun to provide spiritual resources for you at www.ErieRCD.org/inspiration.html. Be intentional about setting aside time to read and pray so you will remain centered. Remember to pray for others at this moment: for our leaders, for researchers, for healthcare workers, for the sick, for our communities, for those who will suffer financial hardship, and for those who have died, as well as their families, among others. As a Christian community, we must intercede on behalf of each other.

We've included a link to Pope Francis' prayer to Our Lady, Salvation of the People of Rome, among the resources we've posted. And although our site also includes a Spiritual Communion prayer, given that we will have no public Masses until further notice, I want to share it with you here. I recommend you pray it every day:

"My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot receive you at this moment sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen."

Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, pray for us.
St. Patrick, patron of the Diocese of Erie, pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence T. Persico". To the left of the signature is a small cross symbol.

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie