

May 15, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Savannah,

Grace and Peace in Jesus Christ our Risen Lord!

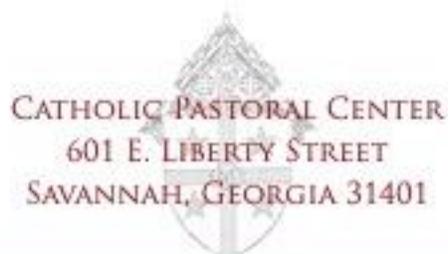
Nearly two months ago, the public celebration of mass was suspended and the churches of our Diocese were locked. Day by day and Sunday by Sunday it tore at all of us – the priests, the deacons, the religious brothers and sisters, and you, the faithful people of God. We continued to celebrate Holy Mass. We celebrated the Sacred Triduum of our Lord Jesus' Passion, Death, and Resurrection without you in the pews. During this time, we were able to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters throughout the world who do not have access to the Blessed Sacrament and to Holy Mass and the other Sacraments as frequently as we normally do. The hearts of your Pastors have been stirred by your faith and your love for Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. We knew your faith was strong. We knew you believed with all your heart. These last two months have shown that love and faith in such beautiful ways. Thank you for bearing with all of us as we tried our best to present Holy Mass to you, and to nurture your faith with devotions and teachings using whatever technology we had on hand.

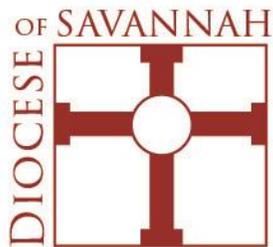
After conferring with the College of Consultors, I would like to announce today that in the Diocese of Savannah, the suspension of the public celebration of Holy Mass will be lifted on Monday, May 25, 2020, while the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday mass will remain in place at least through June 28, 2020. The churches will reopen at the discretion of the Pastor on Monday, May 25, 2020 for personal prayer and daily mass. If the Pastor delays the reopening, he is to contact this office so that we can assist him with his decision. The first Sunday Mass to which the faithful may be readmitted will be Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020.

Our return to our churches to pray and worship as communities of faith must be done prudently, judiciously, and gradually. We do not want to open the churches in haste, so we will open for daily mass first on Monday. This will give the Pastors a pattern to follow for the Sunday Masses.

Your Pastor will be asked to develop a plan of safety measures and practices to help ensure that the worship space is safe. Our Diocese of Savannah is diverse and the impact of this pandemic has affected certain parts more than others. The plans developed need to be tailored to fit the situation of each parish. Guidelines and best practices will be sent to the Pastors early next week to assist them as they develop their plan. Included in these plans will be a determination about Parish Office hours and staffing. We will also post these guidelines on our website. When the parish plan is developed, the Pastor will communicate the plan through all the means available to him – website, bulletin, social media, etc.

I would like to remind everyone that if you are ill, do not come to Church. Any parishioners who are uncomfortable about attending Sunday Mass due to the coronavirus or the safety measures implemented at your local parish are excused from their obligation to attend. In addition, if parishioners are in the higher risk category due to current illness, age or suffering a chronic health condition or compromised immune system, they are also asked to remain at home. Please be aware of the risk to yourself and others should you choose to come to mass.





Be at peace. St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, through prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your request known to God. Then the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Remember what St. Theresa of Avila wrote, "Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things pass. God does not change. Patience achieves everything." *Nada te turbe*. Let nothing disturb you. God is in control and we are His children.

As we reopen our churches and begin coming back together to worship our Lord, I ask for your patience with your Pastors and your leaders. Over the last few months, your Pastors have responded beautifully given the circumstances. I am proud of the way they continued to nurture your faith, build community, and continue the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ during these difficult times.

We continue our prayers for all those who are ill with this virus and for those in the healthcare profession that battle it day in and day out. May the Lord grant them healing and wisdom!

Pedro de Corpa and Companions, pray for us! St. John the Baptist, pray for us!

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us!

May the Lord Jesus bless you and your loved ones and keep you all safe. With prayers for each of you, I am

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Daniel F. Firmin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Very Reverend Daniel F. Firmin, J.C.L.
Diocesan Administrator
Diocese of Savannah