



April 17, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Easter Blessings in our Risen Lord!

Thank you for supporting our Catholic parishes and schools and caring for those in need during these difficult times. I have been praying often and intensely for you, especially during Holy Week. I hope you were able to enter into the spirit of those days, whether by participating in the Archdiocesan virtual retreat or the online events in your parish or through your personal prayer at home.

For the past several weeks, the COVID-19 situation has required that we not celebrate public Masses in our churches or hold large gatherings in our parishes. As reflected in the recent extension of the stay-at-home order in our State, the crisis requires that the temporary measures that we adopted are still needed to protect the public good. For that reason, Archdiocesan directives currently in force (including the dispensation of the Sunday Mass obligation) will remain at least until May 4.

Looking further ahead, May and June Confirmations at the Cathedral and Basilica have been cancelled; pastors of the effected parishes have been given the authority to either celebrate Confirmation in their own churches or schedule a later date at the Cathedral or Basilica. We will surely be spiritually enriched as our younger brothers and sisters in such great number choose to complete their initiation in our Church.

I am grateful that so many have felt free to express their emotions with me during the pandemic: support, sadness, confusion, anger. Some think our restrictions have gone too far, others not far enough. There are many questions: Why aren't churches "essential services"? Why can people go to a liquor store, but Holy Communion is unavailable? How we can live our faith under these circumstances? These questions reflect that we are suffering. Please know that I sympathize with your hurt and am inspired by your love for the Sacraments, your parish, and the Church.

Amidst this pain, I remain convinced that the restrictions that have been placed on public Masses and the administration of some Sacraments are consistent with our faith. The Gospel calls us to respect and defend the lives of our families, neighbors, and especially the most vulnerable. This sometimes requires sacrificing our own desires for their good. "There is no greater love, than to lay down your lives for your friends," Jesus said the night before He died. How could we as His disciples receive the Sacraments without thought or care for the safety of others? The Eucharist is re-presentation of Jesus' own sacrifice, and He

commands us to follow His example by making sacrifices in how we live out our faith and enter into the Church's sacramental life. "As I have done, you also must do."

By God's grace, such sacrifices seem to be benefitting our community. Minnesota's hospitals and health-care providers have so far been able to keep up with the number of people needing life-saving medical care. Even so, public health officials say the precautions being taken must continue for the immediate future. Our Archdiocese stands in solidarity with our brothers and sisters all over our country and around the world as we together strive to overcome this public health crisis. We are hoping and praying that the actions we have taken here will mitigate the pandemic and help us return to familiar public interactions, even if it may be some time before we return to "normal" life in society.

Meanwhile, please find comfort in the fact that priests continue to celebrate Mass on behalf of the Church and for your intentions every day. I am delighted to hear that via technology, many of you, though not physically present, have been uniting yourselves with the Eucharistic sacrifice being offered and making a spiritual communion. I am hopeful that we will continue to find new and creative ways of living our faith while doing our part to stem the pandemic, always mindful of the best advice of public health experts.

As this Easter Octave draws to a close, let us together ask for the intercession of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Please be assured of my prayers for you and your families.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Bernard A. Hebda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis