



## BISHOP OF HAMILTON

### **FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

#### *On the Pandemic Sacrifices*

My dear friends,

The decision to close our churches and suspend public celebrations of the Mass has been a painful one for our clergy, religious, and all the lay faithful in the Diocese. While the sadness of our inability to gather to celebrate the Eucharist is profound, some of the responses to this closure – in addition to falling short of the demands of charity – betray a fundamental lack of understanding not only of why this great sacrifice is being made, but also whose example we follow in so doing.

We know that Holy Communion is the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, the source and summit of the Christian life. His death is the ultimate sacrifice of love for us – to which we are joined when we participate in the Mass and receive Communion. When we eat His Body and drink His Blood, we say that “*we become what we eat*”, the Body of Christ.

During these pandemic days we are uniting ourselves closely to Christ by making serious sacrifice for the health and well-being of others. This is not a matter of weakness. In fact, during these days of sacrifice, we live selflessly, as we profess – much as Jesus Christ urges us to live – for the common good. By definition, sacrifice is never easy – and during these days and weeks and months of sacrifice we come closer to Him – we are more like Him – because our sacrifice emulates His! Our children are learning a very important lesson during these difficult days: sometimes we have to give up our freedoms, privileges and pleasures in order care for others – so they might live!

Over the past 22 years, I have been blessed to have served three Dioceses as Bishop: the Diocese of Labrador City-Schefferville, St. George’s Diocese, (the boundaries of which were extended prior to being renamed the Diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador,) and the Diocese of Hamilton. In the first two Dioceses there were remote communities of Catholic faithful who rarely had the opportunity to celebrate Mass, because there were few Priests. The people longed for Holy Communion and gathered and rejoiced when a Priest visited and celebrated Mass with them so they were able to receive the Body of the Lord. This experience of a long wait between Masses will continue for them into an unknown future.

The fact that they cannot receive Holy Communion, however, does not stop them from praying and nurturing a relationship of love with the Lord: the Rosary is still a staple for prayer, reading the Sacred Scriptures prescribed for the day or for the coming Sunday, sharing reflections and praying with neighbours, saying familiar prayers with family and friends. The faithful in these communities will continue to make this sacrifice for months and years to come. In contrast, in Southern Ontario, where we are privileged to have many parishes and priests to serve them, our pandemic sacrifice will last for a few more months, or for as long as it takes to curb the high numbers of citizens – our brothers and sisters – who contract the dreaded virus.

Since the Ontario Government declared a lockdown in the Province of Ontario effective December 26, 2020, the decision was made, once again, to close our Parish churches in the Diocese of Hamilton. While the current government and public health regulations permit gatherings of no more than ten people for worship (including funerals and scheduled weddings), we are asked to limit all gatherings outside of our homes in order to limit the spread of COVID in the community. In compliance with government and public health directives and out of an abundance of charity, gatherings for Masses in our churches, with the exception of funerals and weddings (up to ten people), even in small numbers are suspended for the period of the lockdown.

The decision to close our churches has not been taken lightly and in no way should it be understood as undermining the central place which the celebration of the Eucharist and the other Sacraments hold for us as Catholics. Our need to gather to give thanks to God remains “*our duty and our salvation*”; our need for true nourishment, which the Eucharist alone provides, continues. Now, however, we unite ourselves spiritually with our priests who are celebrating Mass daily and we rely on the infinite fruits of the Mass to sustain us.

We continue to pray for one another, for those who are suffering in any way during this pandemic and for those who have died. Let us pray with confidence in God’s mercy, that the promise of an effective vaccine will be realized and we will soon be able to return to gather again in our churches to give God thanks, to worship with the sacred assembly, and to be nourished with the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

*† Douglas Crosby*, OMI

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI  
Bishop of Hamilton

January 18, 2021

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