



Office of the Bishop

2020-2021 Pastoral Year Letter – “Towards a Renewed Personal Encounter with Jesus”

A Call to the Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Saint John

September marks the beginning of a new pastoral year. The last few years have presented significant challenges for our Diocese, including the difficult amalgamation process for a number of our parishes and the pandemic. Yet despite these challenges Jesus never leaves us orphans. The Holy Spirit is on the move, and this gives us reason to hope. St. Paul reassures us, “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

As we continue to face the uncertainties of our time, I am calling on all of the faithful to focus on the mission of evangelization and the renewal of our Diocese. This begins when people encounter Jesus Christ and are transformed. Christ, who promised us that he would be with us “always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), is present to us in so many ways. Paragraph 1373 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us,” is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church’s prayer, “where two or three are gathered in my name,” in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But “he is present ... most *especially in the Eucharistic species.*” The sacraments are the privileged ways, the most powerful ways that God shares his divine life with us and enables us to grow in our friendship with him. We encounter Jesus especially in the Eucharist, and in prayer, particularly before the Blessed Sacrament.

Pope Francis tells us that, “the Christian life needs to be nourished by attentive listening to God’s word and, above all, by the cultivation of a personal relationship with the Lord in Eucharistic adoration, the privileged “place” for our encounter with God.” (*Message for the 54th World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2017*). What a grace it is to spend such intimate time with our Lord! I have encouraged our pastors to offer times of Eucharistic adoration in their parishes, and am asking the faithful to take advantage of these times so that we can grow

deeper in our personal relationship with Jesus. Let us devote some of the time spent in adoration to pray not only for renewal in our Diocese and parishes, but also for much needed vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

So as to afford people more opportunities to encounter Christ, I am also asking parishes to offer one tool of evangelization beginning this fall. Some excellent programs include Alpha (which means “beginning”, and is a program covering the basics of Christianity designed to reach the unchurched), Catholic Christian Outreach (CCO) faith studies, or the ChristLife Evangelization Process. It is my hope that many will participate in courses like these in order to rekindle the fire in our hearts and ignite the desire to know Christ and share him with others.

When we experience a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ who gives meaning to our lives, and our hearts are on fire for Jesus, we cannot help but want to fulfill our God-given mission from baptism to be the missionary disciples that we are called to become. We are compelled to reach into the community and serve in various areas of need as apostles of mercy. As the Holy Father tells us, “When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 282). I encourage you to find out which outreach programs your parish supports, and seek out opportunities to serve in your community. It is also through such acts of charity that we encounter the Lord.

Please be assured of my ongoing pastoral solicitude and prayers, as we unite ourselves to the mission of evangelization and renewal. Let us give God permission to move in power in our Diocese, staying close to him in the Word and sacraments and in prayer. May we come alive in our faith, and proclaim him to a world in desperate need of the hope he promises.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Riesbeck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

September 21, 2020
Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist