



Office of the Bishop
PHONE: (702) 735-9605
FAX: (702) 735-8941

Pastoral Letter to the People of the Diocese of Las Vegas

March 18, 2020

My Dear Friends in Christ,

People across the entire globe have been plunged into a world of hardship and uncertainty as the coronavirus continues to take its toll in every nation.

As individuals and families, we are facing the specter of critical illness, certain economic hardship, and the massive disruption of our daily lives.

The Church is no stranger to adversity, suffering, or privation.

In times of difficulty, she has always raised her voice in prayer and earnest supplication, confident that God will hear our every prayer and answer all our pleas.

Down through the centuries, the Blessed Mother has played a vitally important role in times of trial, coming to us as a tender Mother, a tireless advocate, steadfast Intercessor, and cherished friend.

She has visited her people under the familiar titles of Virgin of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Antipolo, and Our Lady of La Vang.

She is beloved in Poland as Our Lady of Czestochowa, in Ireland as Our Lady of Knock, and in Japan as Our Lady of Akita.

Mary is revered by the people in Bosnia–Herzegovina as Our Lady of Medugorje, and in Spain, she is treasured as Our Lady of the Pillar. Mary is known in France as Our Lady of Lourdes, and in Portugal as Our Lady of Fatima.

On May 13, 1846, the Bishops of the United States unanimously chose the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Patroness of our Nation. Their decision was ratified by Pope Pius IX on February 7 of the following year.

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Now is the hour to turn to our Blessed Mother for her maternal help. She is always ready and willing to carry our prayers and petitions to the heart of her Son.

Mary's own words, contained in the Gospel of St. Luke, capture the special place that she holds in salvation history as the advocate and friend of God's holy people. The Scripture says, "*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.*"

I ask you, the people of the Diocese of Las Vegas, to turn to the Blessed Mother, who helps us keep the eyes of our hearts fixed on her Son Jesus during dark and trying days.

The words of a powerful prayer called the *Memorare*, and attributed to St. Bernard, assure us that when we turn to Mary in times of need we have this blessed assurance -- that never was it known that anyone who fled to her protection, implored her help, or sought her intercession was left unaided.

When our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, she posed to him a question that is intended also for you and me. Mary asked Juan Diego, "Am I not here, I who am your Mother?"

Her question is a not-so-subtle assurance that Mary is our Mother too, standing ready and willing to protect and defend us, her children, in times of trouble and uncertainty.

I ask you, the people of the Diocese of Las Vegas, to bring your troubles to Mary. Give her your burdens, your worries. Share with her your cares and concerns. Be assured that under her maternal mantle, prayers are answered and miracles still happen.

Mary will not forsake her children in their hour of need, nor will she neglect our prayers in times of difficulty and distress.

In the days ahead, I ask you to consider praying the Rosary as a family, and ask parents and grandparents to teach your children about the healing power of Mary's maternal care.

I ask all parishioners to pray the beautiful *Memorare* at the close of each day, directing your prayer toward those who are sick and suffering, those who have died, for healthcare workers and researchers, and for civic leaders, who are under particular duress during these trying days.

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I ask you to invite Mary our Mother into your hearts and homes, and to venerate her as your loving Mother, as one who will lead you and your families closer to the heart of her Son.

Each Sunday, I ask you to consider reading the Sunday readings as a family, allowing the living Word of God to draw you into the heart of the Word made Flesh.

Finally, I commend our entire Diocese to the maternal care of Mary, entreating her to "pray for us, O Holy Mother of God," and protect our people with grace, peace, and temporal relief.

I close this reflection with the consoling words of St. Francis De Sales, who had deep devotion to Our Lady, and unfailing faith in God's Provident care. He wrote, "Do not fear what will happen tomorrow. The same loving God who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow and every day. God will either shield you from suffering or will give you the unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace then and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings."

Be certain of my daily prayers and blessings.


Bishop George Leo Thomas, Ph.D.
Bishop of Las Vegas