



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

December 14, 2020

Dear Diocesan Family,

In today's calendar of saints, the Church calls to mind St. John of the Cross, a priest of the 16th century who along with St. Teresa of Avila called the Carmelite order and the Church and its leaders back to their Gospel roots. St. John is famous for writing about the "dark night of the soul." This dark night is not the absence of God and a place of doubt, but rather a "holy darkness" in which the soul is invited to focus on the true light of the world: Jesus Christ.

I think we may all feel that we have been living in dark times, but more than ever the holy season of Advent and the coming Christmas feast are invitations to discover anew the One who gives meaning and light to the dark nights we have been experiencing as a human family. So I write to invite all of us to use the next nine days, which is traditionally called a "novena" – a special time of prayer – to let the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ (the Word Made Flesh) be the star that guides us to Bethlehem. "Bethlehem" itself means "House of Bread", what better could we do than to break open the story that surrounds this place and allow its various aspects to feed our souls?

I welcome those who feel that it is safe enough for them to do so to come with us to Bethlehem at Christmas Mass. All churches of the Diocese of Syracuse will follow the safety protocols and the safe distancing measures that have been in place in the Diocese of Syracuse since May. Occupancy will be based on social distancing guidelines and not exceed our own diocesan standard of 33% building capacity.

I remind especially the most vulnerable and those who care for them, that the obligation to attend Sunday and Holyday Masses remains suspended at this time. As much as we would love to see you worshipping with us, we want you to be safe. I want also to reiterate that if anyone has a cold or feels ill in any way, that person should not be going to church lest we sicken others.

For those attending Christmas and Sunday Masses, **it is very important for you to register** since there are capacity limits for our churches. If you are unable to join us in person, please know that many parishes livestream their Sunday and even Daily Masses and these can be found on our diocesan website at www.syrдио.org. Also, Christmas Mass will be broadcast on Christmas Day on **WSYR Ch. 9** Syracuse at 6 am (and localsyr.com starting on Christmas Eve); **WKTV Ch. 2** Utica at 6 am; **WBNG Ch. 12** Binghamton at 6am.

In this sacred time, we are being called to trust in the fulfillment of God's promises. Another John, known to us as the Baptist, came to testify to the coming of the light of Christ; and in the remaining days of Advent, you and I are invited to make ready for "Love, the Guest is on the Way". To do so, I invite us to use this prayer for the days leading up to Christmas: *Hail, and blessed be the hour and moment at which the Son of God was born of a most pure Virgin at a stable at midnight in Bethlehem in the piercing cold. At that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, to hear my prayers and grant my desires (mention request[s] here). Through Jesus Christ and His most Blessed Mother. Amen.*

Be assured of my continued prayers for you and your loved ones and my very best wishes for a Merry and Blessed Christmas!

In the Name of Jesus,

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse

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