



A letter to the People in the Diocese of Broken Bay

Tuesday 15 December 2020

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

Throughout this year our world has experienced historic disruption with the spread of the COVID19 virus. Many people's lives have been deeply affected. We think, especially, of those who have fallen sick with the virus and those who have died, their families, and those who cared for them – many, many thousands across the world. Economies, too, have suffered; people continue to struggle financially. I am acutely aware of the toll on people's mental health that the year has occasioned. In a few weeks' time we begin a new year, and our faith helps us to look forward with hope.

The life of our community of the Church has also undergone remarkable dislocation. What only one year ago would have been unimaginable came to pass: for several months, our churches were closed; we were not able to gather for the Eucharist; we could not gather to celebrate Easter. I wish to record my deepest gratitude to our priests, deacons, and the Faithful who kept the flame of faith burning brightly throughout that COVID winter. I continue to be moved by the stories of how our communities kept connected using new technologies and by the pastoral diligence that our clergy demonstrated throughout that period towards the people entrusted to their care.

We cannot but salute our civil authorities for the way in which they have ensured the safety of our Australian community throughout the crisis of the pandemic. As the virus has thankfully become more contained in our own country, restrictions on gatherings have been able to be eased. With the recent changes announced by the NSW Government in early December, many of our parish communities are now able to gather in a way that is reminiscent of the time before the pandemic. This enables us to approach the celebration of Christmas with anticipation and joy. Nevertheless, we will still need to be vigilant in care of one another by maintaining some of the safe-behaviours that have thus far served us well.

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In my Decree of 18 March 2020, in response to the crisis of the pandemic, I dispensed the Faithful of the Diocese of Broken Bay from the ordinary obligation to be present at the Sunday Eucharist. Now, with the welcome situation that has developed, with gratitude to God, **I rescind that Decree, and call upon and encourage the Faithful to resume their obligations as part of the living Body of Christ. Under Canon 1247, the Faithful are now once more obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and the Holy Days of Christmas and the Assumption.** Notwithstanding, those who are aged or have health conditions or are otherwise anxious about the risk of COVID19 are free to remain at home, honouring the Lord's Day through the best way open to them. Some examples are participating in the live-streamed Mass, private prayer, reading the Scripture, praying the Rosary.

In so reaffirming our obligation to participate in the Mass, the source and summit of our Christian life, we recognise again the importance of tangibly expressing our communion of life in Christ. Each of us is a living and vital member of the Body of Christ. Our coming together as the community of the Church, to give praise to the Father through Christ in the Spirit, defines our identity. As the Fathers of the Church were apt to declare, the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church! Though technology has enabled us to remain connected, such presentations can never replace the significance of the physical gathering of the community of faith in the Eucharist by which we see and hear and touch the communion into which we are invited by the Lord.

So, now let us gather as disciples of the Risen Lord and come back together to worship the Lord through the sacred celebration of the Mass. I pray that our commemoration of the birth of Jesus this year may be one of faith, and may it be filled with the love, joy, and peace of Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads '+ Anthony Randazzo'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL
Bishop of Broken Bay