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Pastoral letter to the People of Parramatta on the return to worship

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Praised be to our God who as St Paul says is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him (Romans 8:28).

Next, I want to say a big thank you to all the families and parish communities in our Diocese of Parramatta!

During the long months of necessary lockdown, you have all risen to the challenge of sustaining one another through times of great isolation, loneliness, and grief in an impressive variety of ways, spiritual, emotional and practical. Thank you for bearing all these things with patience and for promoting the common good so responsibly.

I especially thank all who have worked tirelessly, in hospitals, aged care homes and across the nursing and medical profession for giving of yourselves so generously.

I thank all who have worked valiantly in our schools, facing unforeseen demands, and meeting them with characteristic professionalism, a sense of duty and dedication.

So many laity, consecrated persons, deacons, and priests have given so generously of their time and energy to keep open our churches here in the Diocese of Parramatta, as havens of peace and prayer.

In this pandemic crisis so many have creatively developed diverse new patterns of outreach - of prayer, catechesis, study, and spiritual solidarity; all who have made participation in the Mass possible through the internet. A special thanks to our Diocesan team who have provided us with *The Well* (thewell.org.au) which has nourished so many in these trying times, including those from far and wide.

Perhaps, some may be concerned that when things finally return to 'normal,' many Catholics will have grown accustomed to staying home and either watching Mass online or not participating at all.

But as we all know deep down, 'virtual' worship can never really replace the in-person celebration of Mass. Livestreamed liturgies should remain available for the sick and the elderly. But, even then, parishes should try to reach out to them in a personal way so that they remain connected to the community.

And how can we fail to thank all those in the outreach agencies of our Diocese who serve the Body of Christ in the poor, the refugees, the lonely and all on the 'peripheries'? They have contributed magnificently to the immense effort of providing food for those most in need. The generosity shown in the distribution of so very many meals and other acts of solidarity has given eloquent expression to the mercy, love and compassion which are at the very heart of the Gospel.

What will be the pace of our emerging from this pandemic remains as yet unclear. However, one challenge is certain.

Sometimes in times of stress like these, our work, shopping, sport, and entertainment media can capture our hearts. Let's all now take special care to recover a sense of sacred time as we emerge from this pandemic.

May we all, as the People of God in the Diocese of Parramatta, recommit ourselves to awaken in people a grateful love for the gift of the Eucharist as well as the Lord's Day.

When we go to Communion, we receive Christ in the most intimate way possible during our life — allowing him to become one with us — so that we actually become what we receive, the Body of Christ.

May we again devote ourselves to the grace and beauty of the Eucharist. Our Risen Lord is so close to us in the Eucharistic mystery.

Strengthened by His Body and Blood, our Saviour Jesus of Nazareth, constantly sends us out on mission, to live the Gospel afresh.

In Christ,



**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv
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*Given at Parramatta on 22 October 2021
The Feast of St John Paul II, Pope*