Bishops ask people not to lose heart in the midst of additional restrictions



by Brenda Drumm

The Bishops have urged parishioners not to lose heart in the face of further Covid-19 restrictions and insisted that they will work to impress upon the civil authorities the vital importance of public Masses.

In a statement issued following their virtual quarterly plenary meeting, the bishops' conference

said, “Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic the people of Ireland have endured testing times with courage, resilience, and compassion. Individuals and communities have made great sacrifices for the protection of life, health and the Common Good. Like many others, the Church has endeavoured to support the people of Ireland, north and south, in the face of considerable uncertainty and disruption. We owe a great debt of gratitude to our priests and to the many volunteers whose continued dedication has ensured that our churches have remained very safe places to gather for Mass and the Sacraments. We have also been blessed in the commitment of our school communities who have been supporting our young people in very demanding circumstances, including assisting with their preparation for the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

“Now that more restrictive measures are being put in place, we encourage people to persevere and not to lose heart. Faith and prayer, in the home and in church can be a huge support in difficult times. While we fully support the guidance of the public health authorities, we will continue to engage constructively in the coming days with the civil authorities to ensure that our people have continued access to the support of Mass and the Sacraments and essential spiritual nourishment for these challenging times.”

Bishops emphasised that the communal celebration of Mass and the Sacraments – even with restricted numbers – is at the very heart of what it means for us to be a Christian community. They said, “These are not simply ‘gatherings’ of people, but profound expressions of who we are as a Church. For parishes, and individual Catholics, the loss of these spiritual supports can be a source of great anxiety, and fear, and can have a detrimental impact on their overall health and well-being.”

Bishops also outlined plans to hold a special memorial service of prayer during the month of November, the month in which we traditionally remember the dead and pray for the bereaved.

“We sense a huge yearning for consolation and hope in the heart of our people. We are especially mindful in 2020 of those grieving families, who, because of restrictions, have been unable to experience the customary spiritual and community supports which are so much part of our Irish tradition. On 1 November at 3.00pm the bishops and priests of Ireland will lead a short service of prayer to dedicate the month of November to ‘Remembrance of the Dead and Prayer for the Bereaved’. We invite the whole country to unite in this moment which will be followed by parish liturgies throughout the month of November, reaching out as much as possible to those who cannot be physically present.”, the bishops said.

Looking ahead the bishops said that Advent and Christmas are likely to be very different this year. They said, “Advent, as a time of patient, hopeful waiting and longing, will have a particular resonance in these times, while the much- needed joy of Christmas may well be tempered by the impact of restrictions. We encourage parish communities to explore creatively ways in which the hope of Advent and the joy of Christmas can be realised and safely celebrated.”

Concluding their message the bishops focused on frontline workers, saying, “The courage, compassion and generosity of Irish people during the pandemic – especially that of our health workers, carers, priests and others working in essential services – has been uplifting and inspiring. In this mission month of October, we appeal for your support for Trócaire, Saint Vincent de Paul Society, our missionaries and other charities who are reaching out to the poorest and most in need – both at home and in the furthest corners of the world. Let us not ‘*pa ss by on the other side*
’, but, in the example of Christ, open our hearts and reach out our hands in response to their great need.”