



**DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**

Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

June 19, 2020

Dear Brother Priests:

Our celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus occurs in a unique moment of history. From the traumas and deaths experienced in the COVID-19 crisis to the societal turmoil that has followed the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, we have embraced the Cross of Christ (so often virtually) with the people we serve.

Together on this Solemnity, we continue to pray for all medical personnel and front line responders, including our brother priest and deacon hospital chaplains.

We remember the souls who have died from COVID-19 and their families. We remember in a special way the souls of Fr. Ted Howard, Msgr. Rom Sosing and Fr. Ernest Lorfanfant, SM. and for Fr. Paul Dahm who also died during this time.

Together, we continue to witness to racial justice and harmony, social justice and change grounded in the sanctity of human life, non-violence, a Spirit-driven approach to conversion and reform, and a joy in proclaiming the Splendor of Truth of Catholic moral teaching in season and out of season.

As Catholic priests, we always recognize the power of the Paschal Mystery in these events, and as priests we always plunge ourselves directly into the rhythm of the Paschal Mystery, especially in times of crisis.

On this Solemnity that proclaims the tender mercy of Our Lord and His compassion for sinners, I ask all of us to seek that mercy, repentance and renewal that flow from His Sacred Heart. When that mercy touches our wounded hearts, it gives us the grace to live our priestly call with new zeal and authenticity.

As we ask on this Solemnity for the grace of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to animate, strengthen and uplift our priestly hearts in these challenging times, I want to express my thanks to each one of you for your courage, your deep commitment to deep and consistent prayer, your pastoral and evangelizing creativity, your steadiness, your fine prudential judgment and your determination to support each other fraternally in a spirit of presbyteral unity and charity even when we experience differences of opinion and perspective.

Thank you too for hearing confessions today and for your pastoral sensitivity in the parish liturgical and sacramental transitions that you are leading.

Tomorrow, June 20, 2020, we will celebrate the Priesthood Ordination of Deacon Rafal Borowiejski and Deacon John Crozier and on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, June 29, 2020, we will celebrate the Episcopal Consecration of Bishop-elect Luis Miguel Romero Fernandez, M. Id., DD, our Vicar for Hispanic Ministry and Evangelization, and the pastor of Our Lady of Loretto parish.

As we pray for them, we ourselves approach the throne of grace boldly and humbly asking the Holy Spirit to lead us to even greater spiritual, pastoral, theological and evangelizing depth.

I recently rediscovered my college yearbook quote from that genius of paradox, G.K. Chesterton.

He writes: “It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one’s own...in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages...the wild truth reeling but erect.”

Our Lord’s establishment of the Catholic priesthood is one of those *wild truths of history* that is attacked, questioned, parodied, and dismissed as archaic and out of touch in every decade and in every century.

And yet the truths of the mystical identity and pastoral charity of priests and the *wild truths* that priests proclaim from the ambos, altars and rooftops of the world continue to thunder through the ages with the same power and force with which Elijah’s chariot rose to heaven.

In his Holy Thursday homily this year, Pope Francis said: “This is what we experience in today’s celebration: the Lord who wants to remain with us in the *Eucharist*. And we become the Lord’s tabernacles, carrying the Lord with us.”

The priesthood, when lived in a spirit of dedication, sacrifice, prayer and a love for the Cross, lights up the Church and the world. It has a fresh, creative and vital relevance and impact at every moment in history, including this moment of COVID-19 and societal upheaval.

The holy priests of the 21st Century and of all of Church history, rays of light streaming off a kaleidoscope of inspired biblical texts, live this description of prayer given by the Cure of Ars: “Prayer is nothing else but union with God. When one has a heart that is pure and united with God, he is given a kind of serenity and sweetness that makes him ecstatic, a light that surrounds him with marvelous brightness.”

The ecstatic rhythm of the holy priest’s life is a reflection of the rhythm of the Mass.

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, St. John Paul II writes: “The ministry of priests who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders, in the economy of salvation chosen by Christ, makes clear that the Eucharist which they celebrate is *a gift which radically transcends the power of the assembly* and

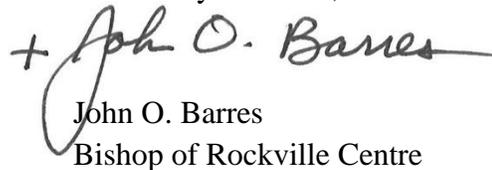
is in any event essential for validly linking the Eucharistic consecration to the sacrifice of the Cross and to the Last Supper...If the Eucharist is the center and summit of the Church's life, it is likewise the center and summit of priestly ministry. For this reason, with a heart filled with gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, I repeat that the Eucharist 'is the principal and central *raison d'être* of the sacrament of priesthood, which effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist.'" (29, 31)

You and I pray with and for the people those miraculous words of Our Lord, "This is my Body...this is the chalice of my Blood...poured out for you." These words are given to us by the Lord to be our words, we whom He has called to offer our very selves with Him in love and trust to Our Heavenly Father for the sake of the world.

Brother priests, thank you for living these *wild truths* of our Catholic Faith so powerfully, so joyfully and so inspirationally.

Let our consecration, mission and pastoral charity as Catholic priests be one of the *wild truths of history* that goes thundering through the 21st Century!

Fraternally in Christ,

+  John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre