



May 23, 2021
Pentecost Sunday

Dear Friends in Christ,

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the Apostles the incredible gifts that enabled them to build the Kingdom of God. Pentecost honors the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and encourages us to seek new beginnings and personal and communal renewal. Today we remember the birth of the life-giving Church, which helps us to live the joy of Resurrection and the blessings of the Easter Season at all times and through all hardship. Today we *Reflect, Renew and Rejoice* in the Lord's goodness to His people in our historic Diocese of Savannah and beyond. We have much to be grateful for, and with thankful hearts we ask our Lord, His Blessed Mother and, in a special way, St. Joseph, Patron of the Church, to strengthen us in faith, hope and charity as we look to the future.

Twenty-three years ago today I was ordained a Priest. Eight months ago today I was ordained and installed as your Bishop. As I celebrate these milestones, I want you to know that it is an honor and blessing to be your Shepherd. It is my privilege to accompany you, the beautiful people of God, and to do my best to lead our faith community after the model of Jesus who came to serve, not to be served. In embracing my call to ministry, I am inspired by the words of Pope Francis regarding the role of the Bishop: *May bishops be shepherds, close to the people; fathers and brothers, may they be gentle, patient and merciful.* I ask for your daily prayers that I may be able to live these words and be the Bishop and Shepherd that you need and deserve.

You have inspired me by the many good things I have seen while traveling throughout the 90 counties of our beautiful and diverse diocese: the Good News is preached and lived; sacraments bring the grace and healing power of Christ to all; the ministries of love and service are carried out through Catholic Charities and social apostolates; children, youth, young adults and adults are formed in faith by our parishes, schools and ministries; family life is nurtured; diverse cultures and ethnic communities are recognized and respectfully served; and spiritual needs are nourished by Clergy, Religious and lay faithful in every region of our 37,000 square mile mission diocese. I am truly impressed by your faith and dedication, and especially by your hope for the future.

As a faith community, we are united by our personal relationship with the Almighty. Even in the midst of the recent challenges presented by the worldwide pandemic, social unrest, and economic disruptions, we realize that we are never alone... *God is with us* (Matthew 1:23). Our response to these challenges is to live the Gospel message as a community: the Church, the Bride of Christ. Jesus is the foundation of what has been and the hope for all that is yet to come.

DIOCESE OF SAVANNAH † OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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The Mission of the Church

In order to look to the future, we must have a plan. All successful pastoral planning begins with a strong affirmation of the mission which directs and sustains the Church. This mission can be described in multiple ways depending on times and circumstances, but it always focuses on the following from *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations), #5:

...to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom.

As Pope Francis reminds us in his first encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), #30:

Each particular Church, as a portion of the Catholic Church under the leadership of its bishop, is likewise called to missionary conversion. It is the primary subject of evangelization, since it is the concrete manifestation of the one Church in one specific place, and in it “the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative”. It is the Church incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all the means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but with local features. Its joy in communicating Jesus Christ is expressed both by a concern to preach him to areas in greater need and in constantly going forth to the outskirts of its own territory or towards new sociocultural settings. Wherever the need for the light and the life of the Risen Christ is greatest, it will want to be there. To make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform.

A Vision for our Local Church

We are an Easter people, called to be missionary disciples eager to build a better world – one that reflects God’s compassionate love for every one of us. Respecting the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, we imagine a world in which all of our sisters and brothers are welcomed as members of God’s family, treated justly, and given access to what is needed to lead full and productive lives. We envision a Church that is close to her people, that proclaims the Word of God to everyone, and that makes the grace of the sacraments available to those who long for the consolation and healing power of God’s love. We hope to form the faithful so that they are equipped to be fervent witnesses of faith, discerning their gifts and talents and embracing a strong Catholic identity. As the Apostles were confident in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, we must boldly embrace the Good News that Christ’s Kingdom has come, and that the better world we seek to build is truly possible when we cooperate with God’s grace.

We are on a journey to discover Beauty in all of God’s creation, to understand Truth, and to inspire Goodness. Planning for this journey – formulating a vision for our Diocese – must be a shared responsibility, and I would like to invite all of the faithful to participate in setting the future direction for our local Church. This will be a comprehensive planning process designed to help us *Reflect, Renew and Rejoice*.

REFLECT...a listening phase to forge a new vision from our needs and aspirations that can:

- Foster unity
- Generate a new enthusiasm for the faith among Catholics of all ages and in diverse circumstances
- Reconnect with those who have become isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Support our Clergy, Religious and lay leaders
- Allow laity to contribute their gifts of time and talent in meaningful ways
- Identify new talent – those with extraordinary passion, skill and experience – to serve the Church
- Determine and develop the financial and human resources needed to reach people where they are and bring them to where God wants them to be
- Discover the spiritual and temporal needs of Clergy, Religious and lay faithful through a diocesan-wide discernment effort

RENEW...the initiation of a process to:

- Identify pastoral planning priorities across all regions of the Diocese
- Develop specific actions that will have measurable impact on the daily lives of our pastoral leaders and our people
- Identify persons and groups who accept the responsibility for effecting our vision and who embrace accountability for achieving desired results

REJOICE...the celebration of the experiences of our work together, and entrusting to the Holy Spirit the task of guiding the implementation of our new pastoral plan.

Specific details for your invitation to *Reflect, Renew and Rejoice* will be shared via our diocesan communications media. Please check our website (www.diosav.org) for updates as they become available.

An Invitation to Prayer

Inspired by the will of the Father and guided by the Holy Spirit, the plan for our future is led by the grace of God. As we embark upon this journey, I am reminded of the words of Pope Saint John Paul II: *The Holy Family is the beginning of countless other holy families*. As the family of the Diocese of Savannah, I ask that we look to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to watch over our planning and to inspire us in our journey towards greater holiness. Remember the assuring words of Hebrews 13:8: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*. With the guidance of Christ as our cornerstone, we look to the past with gratitude while placing our trust and our future in Him. As we receive His Real Presence in the Eucharist, *which is the source and summit of the Christian life (Lumen Gentium, #11)*, we must realize that we are living stones – we are His disciples here and now, discerning God's will and building His Kingdom. We also ask for the intercession of the Blessed Mother as our Advocate and the source of our confidence. She is an example of faith, hope and love, and she places her mantle of protection over us at all times. Pope Francis has declared this year as the Year of St. Joseph in honor of his unique position in the Holy Family and the guardian of the Church throughout history, especially in times of confusion and danger. St. Joseph is the Patron of the Universal Church and a steadfast model for all. May he help guide us in our planning.

With confidence and courage, I invite you to begin praying for this initiative and to join with me on this journey. To place our proposed process of *discernment, purification and reform* in its proper context, I remind you of the words from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians (4:4-9):

Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

In a special way, I pray that the Lord Jesus Christ will guide us and bring us peace and hope as we seek to discern and carry out the mission entrusted to us as the family of the Diocese of Savannah. With His assistance and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can be ever more faithful witnesses of God's Word, Sacrament, and Service to the people of South Georgia and to our brothers and sisters everywhere.

Thank you for your prayers and support as we seek to *Reflect, Renew and Rejoice*. Please be assured of my daily prayers for you, your loved ones and your intentions. May we meet each day in our prayers and *Rejoice in the Lord* this Pentecost...and *always!*

In Christ,

+ *Stephen D. Parkes*

Most Reverend Stephen D. Parkes
Bishop of Savannah



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE *of* **SAVANNAH**

REFLECT + *renew* + REJOICE

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