



Catholic Diocese of Victoria *Office of the Bishop*

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May 1, 2020

Feast of St. Joseph the Worker

Dear friends in Christ,

“Be Ready to Open the Door”

In solidarity with Pope Francis, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) and a number of Episcopal Conferences throughout the world, today I consecrate the Diocese of Victoria to Mary, Mother of the Church. During this traditional Marian month of May, as we unite in prayer, we continue to seek the maternal protection and intercession of our Blessed Mother during the Coronavirus pandemic. It is most appropriate at this time, unparalleled in modern history, to seek Our Blessed Mother’s protection and intercession with her Son, Jesus. It was Mary’s loving response and “yes” to God’s will that opened up the world to receive God’s only begotten son, Jesus, born of Mary, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

During the month of May I invite everyone to pray the rosary at home, so that the world, and the churches, long houses, mosques, synagogues and temples may be opened in freedom from Covid-19. Opened up to new life, to a “new normal”, creating solidarity, justice and peace, moving towards the horizon of hope for all in the midst of our global vulnerability.

What will “new life” look like? That is a good question, for only God knows the answer. However, if we are docile to the Holy Spirit, we too, will be open to the challenges of a “new normal”. We look forward to the day when our churches will re-open and a small committee is planning for this eventuality to ensure that all are safe, healthy, and there is no further spread of Covid-19. This will mean changes in the way we gather as Church to celebrate the Liturgy. Opening will be much more complicated than closing, for it will be gradual. We need patience and docility to the Holy Spirit for our joyful re-entry as a community, for our full and active participation in the Liturgy, gathered around the table of the Word and Eucharist.

The world and our Church need the intercession of Mary, who reveals the maternal face of God for us, God’s children. We have much to learn from the example of Mary and her faithful responses when she: was fearful and troubled at the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38); experienced the poverty of giving birth to Jesus in a stable (Lk 2: 1-6); fled to Egypt as refugees (Mt 2:13-15); lost Jesus in the temple (Lk 2: 41-49); had no wine at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1-12); and stood at the foot of cross (Jn 19:25-27). Mary’s witness guides the world and us to a new way of authentic humility, and a revolution of tenderness, as we seek a way to live in mercy and justice for the vulnerable. Indeed, vulnerability is what we all experience during this time of Covid-19.

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The global pandemic has pushed the Church, her pastors and people, outside. The words of our Holy Father Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, may now be seen as prophetic for they prepared the way for a “new normal,” provided we are docile to the Spirit, like Mary. “*I dream of a missionary option, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation*”. (#27)

The reality of social distancing, staying home, and not being able to gather in large groups to prevent the spread of a deadly virus (especially to our vulnerable elders) are signs of charity, concern and caution, and represent a dramatic shift. It is a shift for the pastors, school teachers, catechists, and all people as we have shifted from “showing up” in churches and schools, to “showing up” virtually in homes via the phone lines and internet. These moments to reach out, beyond the walls, are unparalleled in modern times. This is also a missionary opportunity that is virtually limited, in terms of our traditional understanding of human encounter. This new missionary opportunity may serve as a time to plant seeds of the Gospel, much like the invisible working of the Holy Spirit in what missiology would call “pre-evangelization”. Again, Pope Francis in *The Joy of the Gospel* points out, “*Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task as we rethink the goals, structures, styles and methods of evangelization in our respective communities*”. (#33)

As we journey through the month of May, and we prepare spiritually to celebrate the feast of Pentecost on May 31st, we are invited to reflect on the role that Mary may have played in that dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when a rushing wind and tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the bewildered and frozen apostles. I think that Mary probably unlocked the door of the upper room, opened it wide, gently pointed her finger towards the open door and said to the astonished apostles, “get going”! Perhaps Mary literally pushed them out the door and compelled them to venture into a very tired and sick world, to the very ends of the earth, to share the Good News of new life in the Risen Christ.

We pray to Mary during the month of May to help us to hear her courageous “yes” to God at the Annunciation, which opened the door to healing in her Son Jesus. May her going forth in that “valley of tears,” all the way to the foot of the cross and beyond to the empty tomb and Pentecost, lead us to a “new normal” as disciples of her Son. May the people of God no longer be satisfied with the old normal of “showing up” in buildings. But rather, “showing up” for the marginal, weak and scattered flock of our communities, to build a civilization of love – one sidewalk at a time, one vulnerable person at a time. We pray fervently for the intercession of Mary, our Blessed Mother, for the grace and tenderness to help us to accompany in humility and hope all whom we encounter on our pilgrim journey.

In Communion,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Gordon".

Most Rev. Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria

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