



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

EASTER 2019

Dear Friends:

As we celebrate Holy Week, the Easter Vigil, Easter Sunday, Divine Mercy Sunday and, indeed, the entire Easter Season on Long Island, we remember the power of the Risen Christ so eloquently captured in the Resurrection narratives of the four Gospels.

These Resurrection accounts put us in the presence of the Risen Lord and open us up to his power. These narratives reveal the Risen Christ's glorified wounds.

The light that streams from the glorified wounds of the Risen Jesus touch the wounds of the Church, the wounds of survivors of clergy sexual abuse, the wounds of our families and the wounds of the human family.

The power of the Risen Christ rolls back the stones of spiritual inertia and lukewarmness from our hearts, so that we can embrace a new and compelling spiritual vitality and commitment to advance *dramatic missionary growth* on Long Island and beyond.

It is my role as your Bishop, as your successor to the Apostles on Long Island, and as your servant, to be a teacher of prayer. Every Pastoral Letter, every Catholic Faith Network *Encounter* program, every YouTube video, and every Twitter message I share with you, is designed to open us all to a deeper spirit of prayer, holiness and evangelization.

In my 2019 Lenten Letter, www.bishopbarreslentenletter2019.org, *Encounter* program link: https://youtu.be/AY_wYWE3b90 I asked us all to recommit ourselves to being deeply biblical Catholics who embrace daily *lectio divina*, the prayerful, daily reading and praying of Sacred Scripture.

In this 2019 Easter Letter, I am asking all of us to recommit to a period of daily silent mental prayer, a simple, heart to heart conversation with God. St. John Vianney, the holy Curé of Ars and patron saint of all Catholic priests, wrote: "Prayer is nothing 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."

In our current noise-addicted and social-media addicted culture, it can seem almost impossible to commit to a serious period of silence and mental prayer each day.

In the past, we may have tried to be faithful and consistent to mental prayer but found we could not sustain it. We may have given up or become so discouraged that we no longer believe that we could ever be serious about mental prayer.

Father Walter Ciszek, S.J. (1904-1984), was a Polish-American Jesuit priest who was imprisoned for more than twenty years for doing missionary work in the Soviet Union. His cause for canonization is currently underway in Rome.

Father Ciszek wrote a memoir of his spiritual journey in which he explains how prayer saved him through his years in prison, in solitary confinement, and even in the Gulag. In the book *He Leadeth Me*, he makes the connection between deep faith and deep prayer: “We cannot pray as if we were talking to the empty air; so in the very act of praying we unconsciously remind ourselves of the reality and the presence of God, thereby strengthening our belief in him ... Without faith, our lives are just so many empty and boring routines, hollow at the core, as day succeeds day with little sense of meaning or feeling of accomplishment. With faith, however, even the most boring and routine action of every day has merit and significance for us – and for the kingdom of God.”

And so, each Easter, we all together humble ourselves and begin again. The power of the Risen Christ allows us a new beginning and opens us up to new vistas of conversion and spiritual growth.

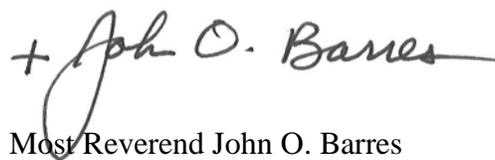
St. Peter of Alcantara (1499-1562) was a Spanish Franciscan friar who lived in the 1500’s and was a master of spirituality. Consider what this great saint said about how mental prayer transforms our lives: “In mental prayer the soul is purified from its sins, nourished with charity, confirmed in faith, and strengthened in hope; the mind expands, the affections dilate, the heart is purified, truth becomes evident; temptation is conquered, sadness dispelled; the senses are renovated; drooping powers revive; tepidity ceases; the rust of vices disappears. Out of mental prayer issues forth, like living sparks, those desires of heaven which the soul conceives when inflamed with the fire of divine love. Sublime is the excellence of mental prayer, great are its privileges; to mental prayer heaven is opened; to mental prayer heavenly secrets are manifested and the ear of God ever attentive.”

This Easter, may the power of the Risen Christ and the Gospel Resurrection narratives open us to the Holy Spirit expanding the height, depth and breadth of our daily mental prayer and our capacity for contemplative concentration.

May each one of us embrace our call as baptized Catholic Christians to not only pray at a deep level ourselves, but also to teach others to pray as well.

May the Holy Spirit continue to raise up contemplative missionary saints on Long Island!

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John O. Barres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre