

Bishop Burbidge (00:00):

This is Bishop Michael Burbidge and you are listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast.

Billy Atwell (00:08):

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Bishop Burbidge (01:23):

I'm doing well, Billy. It's always an exciting time of year, lots of joyful celebrations in our diocese and hope everyone is doing well. Hope everyone had a blessed Memorial Day weekend as we honored those who gave their lives for our country and I hope everyone is refreshed and renewed going into this new month of June.

Billy Atwell (01:43):

Absolutely. Now we've got some major news to announce later in the podcast, but before we get there, on that theme of Memorial Day, what was the attendance like? You celebrated Mass at the Fairfax Memorial Park. What was attendance like, what was the atmosphere and the mood of those who were there present for that Mass?

Bishop Burbidge (01:58):

A very powerful celebration. Celebrating Mass on cemetery grounds is very powerful because it's a reminder that our life here on earth is merely a journey, and we all hope that we get to heaven and, when you're at a cemetery, that truth comes home very powerfully to you.

There was a very good crowd. Everyone at Fairfax Memorial was so gracious and welcoming us. Very good crowd. Hundreds of people to remember the men and women who offered the ultimate sacrifice for our country and the freedom that we enjoy. Even in the midst of mourning such loss, we rejoice because we were celebrating Mass, the truth that Jesus by his own Cross and Resurrection has changed death to life, the gift he promises, eternal life to all those who unite themselves to him.

I think everyone left there with a spirit of renewal. Very much aware that we're called to imitate the selfless sacrifice and service of those we remembered on Memorial Day so that in our nation right

now, we can be instruments of unity and peace, that the Lord so much wants us to be. So it was a very powerful and beautiful celebration.

Billy Atwell ([03:20](#)):

One of the happiest times in the year is when we ordain, we, I say we, you ordain men to the priesthood—I'm giving myself a promotion there. But it's a symbol, I think, of the life and hope of the local church, and you have an ordination this weekend of four men to the priesthood. There's many more men in seminary formation, more coming, but this year we have four young men. Talk about what this means to you as a bishop, especially at the end of a year like we've just had, to be able to ordain these symbols of new hope and life for our church.

Bishop Burbidge ([03:52](#)):

Well it is. As a bishop, it is probably one of the most profound joys you have as a bishop to give birth to new priests within our Church, and, like you said, what a powerful sign that is of the Lord's promise that he will be with his Church forever. Well how can he do that? He does that through his priests who give us the Eucharist. So it's a sign of new life. It is a sign of hope. As bishop, it's a joy for me because, in my time here, I get to know our seminarians so well and then to ordain them as our newest priests is ... I'm filled with profound thanksgiving, and I do want to assure our parishioners thanks to their goodness, to their generosity, their sacrifices, as you mentioned earlier to support the Bishop's Lenten Appeal.

Our men, including these men who will be ordained on Saturday, they are well-formed, they are well-trained. They are receiving excellent education and formation and we hold the standards very high in the Diocese of Arlington because we need men who are holy, who are faithful, who are strong in body and spirit and filled with zeal, and a desire to serve. So we are going to be blessed on Saturday with four new wonderful priests. I congratulate their parents, their family members, and all who have prayed for them throughout the years and we have lots of work for them. They know their assignments and they're ready to go.

Billy Atwell ([05:22](#)):

All right, so Bishop, can you tell us where they're going?

Bishop Burbidge ([05:23](#)):

Yeah. We have four parishes that will be receiving new priests: St. Leo, St. James, St. Andrew and the Basilica of St. Mary.

Billy Atwell ([05:31](#)):

Oh, that's wonderful. So for those who want to view, because unfortunately this year is still an invite-only event for family and close friends of those young men, but it is available via livestream, so it is going to be livestreamed at 11 a.m. from the Cathedral of St. Thomas More. Like I mentioned earlier, if you're on YouTube, if you subscribe to our channel and set up a notification for that, when that livestream kicks off, you'll get an alert. But just know on our Facebook and YouTube channels, you can check out that Livestream at 11 a.m. on Saturday, and we certainly hope that you do. Bishop, one question on vocations. How are we doing with vocations? I think it's a question a lot of people ask but they don't answer.

Bishop Burbidge ([06:08](#)):

We're doing very well. Again I'm grateful because we pray for vocations here in this diocese and I thank our faithful for doing that. So God has blessed us abundantly. It looks like we will have 10, 10 men entering the seminary -

Billy Atwell ([06:23](#)):

That's wonderful. Wow.

Bishop Burbidge ([06:23](#)):

In the fall, so that is wonderful. Sometimes men also discern out of the seminary and that's okay, it's part of the process is that when you enter into seminary, it doesn't mean you're going to be a priest, it means you're taking that next step to see if this is what the Lord is calling. So even when someone leaves the seminary, it's like, "We're going to miss you and all too but you discerned God's will and that's what seminaries help you to do." But we are fortunate to welcome I think 10 new, at this point, 10 new seminarians and it's a great blessing for our diocese.

We do need our priests. I want to encourage all of our communities within our diocese to be fostering vocations because the needs are greater than ever. One need that we're finding out in doing the assignments this year, the need for a priest who speaks Spanish fluently is one of our greatest needs right now because of the growing Hispanic community. So that's very much a requirement now of our seminarians to be able to come out and being able to minister to our parishes that have large Hispanic communities.

Billy Atwell ([07:45](#)):

Wow, that's great, and it's great that they're getting that education. That's what they need. Well, the major news from last week was that you have announced that we would be lifting our restrictions for the Memorial Day weekend and thereafter consistent with the CDC guidelines and the announcements from Governor Northam. So this means that masks are encouraged for those who have not been vaccinated, that social distancing is not required and capacity limits are going away, which is, as you mentioned in your video message, when you announced this, this is the day you've been waiting more than a year for. What is the feedback you've been hearing from the pastors following this first weekend of Masses where we're so to speak back to normal?

Bishop Burbidge ([08:23](#)):

Right. Well, first a spirit of thanksgiving. Like you mentioned, we've been praying for this. Even though our churches have been open since last May, the way we've been worshiping has radically been changed and altered. So to get to the point where we're able to say no social distancing, no capacity limits, we can take ropes off the pew, we can begin having our choirs and put the hymnals back and have offertory processions and holy water, all these wonderful practices that we're so used to as being part of our worship. There was just a spirit of just thanksgiving. And the fact that so many people came back together.

I think one of the comments I heard the most from the priests, it was great literally to see people. That's been one of the challenges of preaching. You're preaching but you're not seeing the smile, you're not seeing the faces. So people were so, so happy for that, and I think all of us should be grateful to God. Our God promised as he has done throughout sacred scripture that he will deliver us through adversity, through trials, through tribulations, and we knew we were going to get to this point. We knew that God was going to lead us to this point. But we didn't know when and to be able to say,

"Yes, it's this meeting last week. It's this weekend. We can all come back together without all these restrictions." A spirit of thanksgiving to God for his goodness, his faithfulness to his promise.

Billy Atwell ([09:53](#)):

I have to imagine for a priest it's very hard to be preaching a homily and not know how it's doing when you can't see the faces -

Bishop Burbidge ([09:57](#)):

You're right. You are definitely right.

Billy Atwell ([10:00](#)):

For better or for worse.

Bishop Burbidge ([10:02](#)):

Right, right.

Billy Atwell ([10:03](#)):

Well the major news that was embargoed until just this morning was when is the dispensation going to be lifted and you have an answer. Talk to us.

Bishop Burbidge ([10:12](#)):

Yes. We do have an answer. The bishops of the province, so that means the Archbishop of Baltimore, the Bishops of Arlington and Richmond and Wilmington, Delaware, and Wheeling-Charleston in West Virginia, along with the Archbishop in Washington, decided that since we do have common bonds and shared geographical areas, lifting of the dispensation should be coordinated to show a sign of unity.

Billy Atwell ([10:38](#)):

That makes sense.

Bishop Burbidge ([10:38](#)):

So since the restrictions and protocols were just lifted this past Memorial Day weekend, we want to make sure we give people some time to get accustomed to that, and so we decided that the dispensation will be lifted the last weekend in June. So June 26 and 27.

Billy Atwell ([10:56](#)):

Very good.

Bishop Burbidge ([10:57](#)):

What that means, Billy, for all of our listeners, as Catholics, we are obliged ... We have a Sunday obligation to attend Mass. In the midst of a global pandemic, we dispensed from that obligation because of all the concerns that were so real to us. But now with the lifting of the restrictions, we say it's now time to come back. Because if you're not here, something is missing. Something is missing in the body of Christ if you're not here. It's time to come together as a community and nothing can replace, nothing can replace being present and hearing the Lord himself speak his word to you. Most essentially nothing

can replace the reception of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. That's the source and summit of our lives, the holy sacrifice of the Mass allows us to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. Nothing can replace that. So now is the time to come back.

What we're saying is that the decisions you have made, because we're seeing it in society, everything is increasing, including traffic is increasing -

Billy Atwell ([12:09](#)):

Yeah. It certainly is.

Bishop Burbidge ([12:09](#)):

Because more people are going out. They're going out to restaurants and bars and stadiums and all those things. So if you're able to do those things, then that of course, you have to be consistent with that in your own spiritual life.

Billy Atwell ([12:21](#)):

That's right.

Bishop Burbidge ([12:22](#)):

Now we also in our statement saying when dispensation is being lifted, also explained what the Church has always taught. That if you are sick, that if you are physically ill or even emotionally unable to be in a crowd or whatever, you're dispensed from that obligation. That's always been our Church teaching. So this dispensation is lifted in light of what we've been through this past year. And again, renewed thanks to our wonderful priests in this diocese because our churches, and we've been having public celebrations of the Masses since last May, but looking radically different. But thanks to our priests for their faithfulness throughout this time and welcome back everyone. Come on back.

Billy Atwell ([13:07](#)):

Yeah. So what is your recommendation for families that maybe have kind of gotten used to not going to Mass on Sundays? Maybe they're going inconsistently or they've just been utilizing the dispensation and not attending at all. It could kind of be almost awkward to kind of get back into that routine that we were used to before. Any thoughts or recommendations for families?

Bishop Burbidge ([13:26](#)):

Yeah, that's a great question. It does require all of us to have, like we do in other areas of our lives, a discipline. While this is maybe more comfortable, for me to be at my best, I need to be more disciplined here. I need to be doing what God is asking me to do and now is the time.

I think the fact that sometimes in the void, the void of not being together with people, the void of not receiving the Holy Eucharist, I think has really motivated people. Because these are precious gifts that sometimes we take for granted. And now I've been without that. Now I want to be back and hopefully pray God that's what our people are experiencing that you're not coming back just because the dispensation has been lifted. You're coming back because you've longed to be in the community of faith, you've longed to hear the Lord's Word and to receive him in the Holy Eucharist.

Billy Atwell ([14:23](#)):

That's wonderful. Thank you. In your last podcast, you talked about the issue of politicians who are pro-abortion but receiving communion in the Church. This is often discussed in the broader of context of eucharistic worthiness that was kind of the phrase that was used last time which would apply to anyone who has committed a grave sin, not just public officials. News has been circulating about whether or not there's an effort to not discuss this issue which was currently on the agenda at the next USCCB meeting in June. Are you able to share any perspective on where that stands and if that issue will be discussed?

Bishop Burbidge ([14:57](#)):

Right. So the June meeting of bishops, that agenda is set in advance by an administrative committee, and the administrative committee I'm privileged to serve on is with chairmen of committee and regional representatives of bishops. So they set the agenda, they approve the agenda.

This document, it's really a teaching document on the Eucharist, is part of our June agenda. Then as you mentioned, and it's been publicly reported, there has been some pause out there where people ... The bishops were suggesting maybe this is not the right time because we'll be doing via Zoom whatever. But it's already on the agenda and so it's going to go forward and what we are discussing is a beautiful teaching document on the Holy Eucharist that has come to us from the Doctrine Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which will talk about the Church's teachings. What we have always taught about the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist wonder and awe that we should have for this precious gift, the disposition in which we should receive the Holy Eucharist. So it will begin to discuss all those issues and our own worthiness to receive the Eucharist for all of us.

But it's a teaching doctrine, a document, and bishops have the opportunity to weigh in on a document, to suggest recommendations and changes and it's meant as a tool and a resource. So yes, this will be on the June agenda. I mean an agenda can always be amended but that's by a vote, but I'm very, very pleased that we are beginning this discussion. I think it's important more than ever because as you mentioned there are even recently politicians and others who are giving their own interpretation of what worthiness of the Eucharist is and it's not helpful because it's not what the Catholic Church is teaching.

For example I read one op-ed where none of us, we even pray that none of us are worthy to receive the Eucharist. Well that's true, because the Eucharist is a pure gift. It's a gift of God. It's God's gift to us. That's why we say, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you." It's a gift and what I read, yes it is healing. Absolutely, the Eucharist is a sacrament of healing, it's the source and summit of our lives. But we have always taught as a Church that, while we're not worthy, we must prepare ourselves to receive such a wondrous gift. We have to have the right disposition.

So we cannot be in a state of mortal sin to receive the Holy Eucharist, no matter what our profession is, no matter what our vocation is. We can't receive the Holy Eucharist if we're in a state of mortal sin or if we're outside of communion with the church. Now thank the good Lord he gives us the remedy to correct that.

Billy Atwell ([18:09](#)):

That's right.

Bishop Burbidge ([18:10](#)):

We can convert our ways.

Billy Atwell ([18:11](#)):

That's the good news.

Bishop Burbidge ([18:12](#)):

We can go to the Sacrament of Penance and ask God's mercy and forgiveness. But don't forget, when Jesus forgave sins and people who had abandoned his ways and all, too, he didn't just say, "Okay, that's fine. Keep going on as you've been going on." He said, "No, no. Now go and sin no more."

Billy Atwell ([18:33](#)):

That's right.

Bishop Burbidge ([18:33](#)):

So we can't approach the Eucharist, "Well, it really doesn't matter because no one's worthy, so I can just come and receive ..." No, no. You have a sacred duty and obligation to make sure you're in communion with the Lord, his Church, his teachings, you're freed from mortal sin, and also that you remember to because it's a nice spiritual practice, that you fast an hour before Holy Communion.

Billy Atwell ([18:54](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Burbidge ([18:55](#)):

Why does the Church ask that? To make us in awe of what this gift, not because we deserve it, but this gift that we're about to receive. So I'm really hoping this document, this doctrine, the document will be discussing as a bishop will be a helpful resource for our faithful and for all of us.

And a reminder, because I see this misunderstanding out there. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, no bishop in his individual diocese is bound to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Billy Atwell ([19:28](#)):

Right, right.

Bishop Burbidge ([19:29](#)):

We collaborate; we support each other. But as an ordinary, as the bishop of Arlington, I am not accountable to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. So when this document is approved, it is up to each bishop how he will implement it, how he will use this in his own diocese.

Billy Atwell ([19:49](#)):

A point that seems to have gotten lost is that this document is about the Eucharist in general. It's a teaching document about the Eucharist, it's not just about politicians and their eucharistic worthiness in that context. It's a much broader teaching that all of us could benefit from in some ways. It's kind of been presented, not by the USCCB, but by the media as being specifically about who can and can't receive Communion, when you're telling us it's a much broader teaching document.

Bishop Burbidge ([20:12](#)):

It's a teaching document on the Eucharist consistent with what the Catholic Church has always taught applying to all people. What we're hoping is not so much ... What we're hoping to generate from a document like this is a spirit of thanks, thanksgiving, eucharistic wonder and awe, and a return to the Eucharist as a source and summit of our lives. It's the source of our consolation, our strength. It's God's most precious gift to us, the gift of his Son.

Billy Atwell ([20:46](#)):

The timing is perfect with the pandemic being over ... Or not over, but whittling down to the point where we can return to Mass and the dispensation [inaudible 00:20:54], it's a perfect time to teach about the Eucharist and why we need to be returning and receiving it.

Bishop Burbidge ([20:57](#)):

Absolutely.

Billy Atwell ([20:58](#)):

Very good. Bishop, you're the former chaplain of a Catholic high school, so I think you probably ... This has a special place in your heart, graduation season. So, we have four diocesan high schools. You've already done some graduations. One, what has that been like, and what is the difference this year than what's taken place in the past?

Bishop Burbidge ([21:16](#)):

Well, the graduations have been great because we had to do them virtually last year so we're doing them in person. Uniquely this year—most of our schools usually go to the Basilica Shrine in Washington—but this year they're doing it, the graduation on their own campus. So we're praying for good weather each day -

Billy Atwell ([21:36](#)):

That's right. I bet.

Bishop Burbidge ([21:36](#)):

Because there's a Plan B, but Plan A is much better...outside on the football field or the field, whatever, and I've done two of our graduations ... Again, there's just such ... After everything that the students and the Catholic educators have been through this past year, there's just such a joy that wow, we did it and we have accomplished something great this year and we have something to celebrate. A word of thanks once again. I can't say it enough to our Catholic educators that have kept our schools open, kept our students safe, complete an academic year without our students falling so far behind, that was incredible leadership and sacrifice and commitment. Congratulations, I always say to our students, our graduates, congratulations. Our schools demand excellence in education. You've accomplished something, that diploma, don't just look at it, that's a reflection of your hard work and your perseverance and long hours and God's grace. So be proud of what you have accomplished.

Always at graduations, you try to avoid the cliches, and I'm so happy when I hear our speakers, especially the students who are elected to speak at graduations. They always mention faith, which is the reason they attend Catholic schools, to be forming faith and as disciples in Christ. So often you can hear the secular terms, we've done it, we've accomplished this, we're going to change the world, and our students highlight, and I certainly try to remind them that you will do none of those things without God.



Whatever you seek to accomplish is only with the grace and the strength of God, so bring him. Bring your faith with you to your next endeavor. Wherever you're going next. I know that you discerned what college or university or what kind of work ... It's part of God's plan for you. This is where God wants you to be. He'll be with you so take him with you. I give our graduates a crucifix I ask them to take with them, and I ask them to hang it in a room, just as a reminder because they're going to go through challenging times and times of blessings, great times and times of suffering, but through it all, God is with them and a reminder to keep close to God and they will have the strength they need.

The most important reminder is that a lot of times at graduations what do we talk about? How we're going to be successful, how we're going to do great things. Don't ever forget the words of Jesus. "Those who are great, those who are successful in his kingdom are those who are willing to serve the rest." So I always pray for our graduates that they will use their gifts and their talents, these new opportunities, to serve God and to serve others, especially those in need.

Billy Atwell ([24:26](#)):

Wonderful. Very good. All right, so we have two questions from the faithful. The first is, "With bishops having very few peers, is it easy to get lonely at times?"

Bishop Burbidge ([24:38](#)):

I would say, thank the good Lord, loneliness is not something—and this isn't for every priest or every bishop—loneliness is not something that I really have dealt with in my priesthood, even as a bishop. I'm blessed, I have a beautiful family, I have great priest friends in three different dioceses now. I have good, good lay friends in three different dioceses. So that's been such a great joy. I love being out with people; I get energized by it. I don't mind when I get home at night if there's a free hour or two just to be still and be with the Lord and relax. That's not lonely for me, that's a time to relax, to settle down, to be with God.

But I would say that the one thing that as a bishop is different is that it's like all of us, if you're a teacher, there's nothing ... You can talk to your family, you can talk to your friends, but there's nothing like talking to another teacher. If you're a married couple, I'm sure the same. It's great to talk to ... But it's great to talk to people your own age and what they're experiencing. Same thing as a bishop. The only bishops ... You know exactly in a sense what other bishops are going through. We don't have that same opportunity because we only see each other a couple times a year in real time.

But I have to say, Billy, one of the things that COVID did for me was—especially when there were lockdowns and the nights were free—bishops began calling each other. Myself included. I really wasn't in the habit of doing that but I began saying, "I want to call bishop so and so, see how he's doing," and vice versa.

That really has made a really positive difference in my life and in the life of bishops. You know, we might to do that more often.

Billy Atwell ([26:32](#)):

I was going to say, you got to keep that up.

Bishop Burbidge ([26:33](#)):

We got to take care of each other.

Billy Atwell ([26:34](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Burbidge ([26:34](#)):

Yeah, so. But I think, pray God, we will.

Billy Atwell ([26:37](#)):

That's very good. All right. The next question is, "One thing I've learned during COVID is how much I appreciate actually going to Mass in person. Going back I felt a ton of relief. How do I keep that appreciation up going forward? I don't want to forget what I've learned?" This is a great question.

Bishop Burbidge ([26:52](#)):

That's a great question, it really is a great question, and I go back to just a spirit of thanksgiving. Because what happens, when do we begin to kind of go back to old routines and old habits, is when we begin to take people or gifts for granted. Then we just ... We kind of just go along, but when you have a spirit of thankfulness and you're aware everyday, even though we all have our struggles, we all have our crosses. Every day, God's blessings are in our midst and if we're able to see those blessings and have a thankful heart, we're not going to become kind of just neutral or passive, and especially for God's spiritual gifts and, namely, the Eucharist. It's like just that reminder, what this is. So I think the only way, the answer to your question is only by having a grateful heart. That's why I always like before Mass and after Mass to say a prayer in preparation before you even go into Mass. There's beautiful prayers in our Catholic books and journals and prayers, after Communion. Say those prayers and it keeps you ... A thankful heart will always keep you from falling into kind of just being neutral, passive and casual.

Billy Atwell ([28:08](#)):

Well, Bishop, we've covered a lot in this podcast. We've got a big ordination coming up. We've got the dispensations lifted at the end of June, so a lot going on here in this month of June, which is sometimes a slower month -

Bishop Burbidge ([28:18](#)):

I know.

Billy Atwell ([28:18](#)):

But not this year.

Bishop Burbidge ([28:18](#)):

I know, there's a lot.

Billy Atwell ([28:20](#)):

Any final thoughts and if you would send us off with a blessing?

Bishop Burbidge ([28:23](#)):

No, but everyone, I think we're all at the point where we thank the good Lord for giving us the perseverance and patience and strength to endure what we have gone through this past year, radically changing the way we live and work and go to school and even worship. So we give thanks to God. We

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pray, we know people have lost loved ones throughout this year. We pray for them, for their eternal peace, and strength for their families, and we know that people are still suffering, so we're mindful of that also. But we do have many blessings. God is faithful to his promises. He's delivered us. He's delivered. He got us to this point, so let's come together as brothers and sisters, encourage each other and strengthen each other in faith. Help each other to walk humbly with our God.

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