<DATE>

<ADDRESSEE>

<ADDRESS>

<CITY>, <STATE> <ZIP>

Dear <NAME>,

The pain was incredible.

Last week I was in my kitchen cooking dinner. I think it was tacos. And, for some reason, I was barefoot. And as I turned away from the stove, I stepped on something *sharp*.It was excruciating. Something small and extremely pointy stabbed right into the soft pad of my foot.

I’ve heard parents talk about what it’s like to step on a Lego with bare feet. I don’t have kids (obviously!), but I think this is the kind of pain they were talking about. It was so intense, and it took over my whole brain. Whatever I was thinking or doing at the time melted away in an instant. In its place was blinking red light and a wailing siren that shouted, “*Make it stop!”*

Nobody likes going through pain. I know I don’t.

But pain serves a purpose. Pain *focuses* us in a way that nothing else can. It shakes us loose and propels us out of our comfort zone. It stops our routine and demands our attention.

The past 12 months have been full of pain. Some of the pain has been direct – the pain of illness or of losing a loved one. Or the pain of losing a job or dealing with a major economic setback.

Some of the pain has been indirect. Like the pain of living, day after day, with a general sense that *things aren’t quite right*. Or the pain of losing the things we took for granted. Maybe you’ve even experienced the pain that comes from living in close quarters with spouses and children you love…but you don’t have enough absence to make your heart grow fonder...

I think you also felt pain from being away from Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. For some of you, that pain was obvious. For others, it was more subtle. Maybe you didn’t even notice it until now, as you read this letter.

I want you to take a moment right now and think of our quiet church, with the altar, the tabernacle, the crucifix and the candles…and remember the smell of incense and the feeling of peace that washes over you when you’re deep in prayer. Do that, and I think you might start to realize just how much you’ve been missing our parish community. And how painful this past year has been because you were deprived the Eucharist at Mass and you were deprived the visible love, friendship and support of your parish family.

Hopefully the pain of this past year helped to focus your attention on what is important in in life. Faith. Family. Health. Friendship. Kindness. Community.

We are, God willing, turning the corner on the pandemic. Vaccines are being distributed to those who need them. Businesses, schools and hospitals are settling into a rhythm. It will take time to return to normal, but we know the day is coming.

And I want you to know that **our parish will be ready**. We’ll be here to welcome you – and all your friends, neighbors and fellow parishioners – with open arms.

I’ve spent months reflecting on this pandemic, and how it has impacted our Church and community. And as the pain of these dark months subsides, I find myself focused like never before. I’m focused, grateful and excited for everything that lies ahead of us in 2021. God has done so many good things in the last year. I see his hand at work – especially now!

Here’s what I know today:

1. We are coming back from this, and our parish will be stronger because of it.
2. We are going to celebrate our return to the Eucharist and our parish “re-opening” in a big way. I think we could all use a celebration this year, and I personally can’t wait. Stay tuned for more details.
3. As things return to normal, we will cherish every moment of community and fellowship and take nothing for granted.

I hope you know that I never take you for granted either. Your support of our parish means the world to me, and I appreciate all that you do.

You and your family are in my prayers, and I hope that I am in yours.

Gratefully in Christ,

<INSERT SIGNATURE OR HAND SIGN>

<PASTOR NAME>
<PASTOR TITLE>