



Dear People of God

Along with much of the rest of America, the Church is ready to move beyond the pandemic and do its best to restore normalcy to the Church. Ohio's Bishops, who have been working closely with the Ohio Department of Health, provided us with a dispensation from the obligation to attend weekly Mass about a year ago to help address the health concerns of the coronavirus. Beginning on the weekend of 5-6 June – keeping with the governor's order lifting pandemic era restrictions for the fully immunized - that dispensation will come to an end and the expectation of the Church will be the regular presence of the community in the community to offer prayer, adoration, and worship so that the entire community might celebrate fully both Word and Sacrament. Our own bishop will shortly make available some bulletin inserts which explain the obligation and why the Church has the famous "precept" to attend Mass weekly (in essence, it's to make sure we all adhere to the Commandment given to Moses to "keep holy the Lord's day" and to repay the immense debt of gratitude we owe to Jesus for his sacrificial gift of self out of his love of us).

I realize that many of us, raised in and exposed to a culture which has made the individual the center of the universe, the obligation to be with your fellow Catholics to accept the wonderful gift of the Eucharist leads to contempt for any rules which we individually deem to restrict our freedom to do as we please. On the other hand, I often share with those who wonder why we have to be at Mass a simple illustration. I'm sure all of us from time to time get distracted by others at the celebration of Christ's Body and Blood and instead pay attention to those others gathered with us. Imagine the seasoned parishioner who is bothered by all the years of fidelity paid to this celebration who, distracted by a young person who may not even want to be there, feels the powerful reality of the faith being transmitted to the next generation. That youngster has become an agent of God's insightful presence. Or imagine the young person gawking around the assembly whose eyes stop to linger on a bent-over elderly parishioner barely able to stand or walk, and the youngster is touched by the fidelity which has led that nearly disabled member of the community to Mass week after week for innumerable years on end. Our presence becomes ministry without our ever realizing what we've accomplished.

In the end, we're at Mass as much for others as we are for God, giving due adoration to the divine but recognizing the divine present in the people - men and women, young and old - gathered together as one Body of Christ. We're diminished by the absence of everyone who could be at Mass but chooses not to come. Yes, we're tired, we work hard all week, we don't have a lot of free time, we do enjoy sleeping in, the kids have to be at this or that practice or game – but I would have you think seriously on the mantra: *it isn't home without you*. Please, if you've been taking advantage of the dispensation to stay at your home on Sunday, come back now to your church home. Come home to the wonder of God present to us in Word and Sacrament. Come home to your friends and fellow parishioners who share in the mystery of the Body of Christ. And invite your family, friends, neighbors, and total strangers to come home to the Church to find the peace and serenity of God in loving community.

And now for the practicalities of getting back to normal:

With the Governor lifting all restrictions on gatherings beginning 2 June, we will have the church restored to its pre-Covid 19 environment beginning the weekend of 5-6 June. We will, however, continue for the foreseeable future to have a section near the front of the church reserved for those who wish to continue practicing social distancing. *Those not wearing masks should not sit in that area* to respect those who wish to continue wearing masks and stay somewhat apart; masks may be worn anywhere in the church. If you customarily sat in what will be the reserved section and choose not to practice social distancing, including wearing a mask, please find another pew in which to celebrate the liturgies. Pandemic era sanitizing will continue in the reserved section. The 8:00 am Mass for the vulnerable and those wishing to celebrate in a smaller crowd will be continued at St. Patrick's with no substantive changes from its current format.

All of us are excited to be back among friends and I anticipate a lot of good conversation both before and after Mass. I would ask, however, that the conversations before Mass be conducted in a lower tone to respect those who wish to prayerfully prepare for the Sacred Mysteries. Shouting our hellos across the church can be very disruptive of prayer so please speak quietly and save your exuberance for after the celebration of the liturgies.

Bishop Thomas has suggested that we return to the full and active participation called for by II Vatican Council. All ministries will be restored beginning the weekend of 5-6 June:

- Holy water fonts will be refilled and available, the water changed each week to assure cleanliness. The holy water dispenser will be refilled as well.
- Ropes on the pews will be removed except as stated above. Masks may be worn anywhere in the church by those who prefer a mask but do not want to observe other social distancing expectations.
- Hymnals will once again be available, and I hope they will be used by everyone attending Mass since full and active participation does not mean sitting there listening to others doing all the singing. I invite all with a good voice to join the choir to enhance choral settings of the hymnody and perhaps reintroduce antiphonal singing which was the norm not that long ago.

- Entrance and recessional processions will be restored at Masses where they were common prior to March of 2020 which means we need to see some of our servers come back to the altar.
- Readings by the faithful will be expanded to a larger group of Lectors so if you were or want to be a Lector, let the office know ASAP so a schedule can be developed.
- The Offertory Procession from the back of the church will be restored if volunteers are available to make it happen (with the exception of the 4:00 Mass at Immaculate Conception and weddings and funerals when the procession takes place near the front).
- The invitation to the Sign of Peace will be an invitation to extend some sign more personal than that currently being shared, but please do not force yourself on your neighbors if they do not wish to make physical contact.
- The bishop reminds us that there should be no holding hands during the Lord's Prayer.
- Communion stations will be restored as they were prior to the pandemic and the recommended spacing between communicants will be canceled.
- The common cup will be available at each station in a limited form for the time being for those who are willing to share from the common cup (you do not need to do so) if Ministers are available at Mass. All certified Ministers will be contacted to discover your willingness to be scheduled to distribute either the host or the Precious Blood. The Extraordinary Minister distributing where social distancing is being observed *will be required to wear a mask to distribute* and other Eucharistic Ministers at any station may also do so if they wish. Those practicing social distancing are asked to refrain from the common cup.
- Hospitality following Mass will be resuming in June with the customary ice cream social following Sunday liturgies,