

Opening the Masses

From: Fr. Tony Hesse

As you probably heard or read, the Bishops of our state have lifted the suspension on the public celebration of Masses and is allowing us to have public Masses again. However, as Bishop wrote in his May 1st letter to the people of our diocese, "We will have to do so with carefully defined protocols in order to keep people safe and to prevent the spread of the virus. We know that if we work together, we can do this safely." In conjunction with Bishop's May 1st letter and the letter that is attached this weekend, here are the plans that our AFC (Area Faith Community) Worship Committee put together to help us remain safe but to still celebrate the Mass and other services reverently. One thing to keep in mind, this may all change from week to week.

First of all, in light of Sunday Mass, Bishop writes this, "Those over age 65 will be strongly encouraged not to attend. As circumstances allow, a visit from a priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to bring them the Eucharist may be possible. Also, anyone showing any symptoms of sickness, or anyone who has a household member who is sick or showing symptoms of sickness should not come to Church." Although this is for Sunday Mass, you are invited to come to weekday Masses. I know this will be hard for those who do want to go but are unable to go. Please think of this as Bishop's concern for your health and wellbeing, and as I mentioned last weekend in my homily, an opportunity for sacrifice. Remember, the bishops of the state have removed the religious obligation to attend Mass on Sunday so no one should feel the obligation to come if they do not feel safe.

As you see by the weekly schedule, we have the dates, times, and places that we will be having public Masses, adoration, and confessions in our parishes. We will see how this all goes. Starting June 1st, we will be stopping the conference call Rosary, but we are still encouraging parishioners to pray at 12pm the Rosary on their own and the 3pm Chaplet in solidarity with the rest of the AFC. If you would like to see the conference call Rosary continue or for more adoration or confession times, please let us know at the parish office. Keep in mind, things in church will also require more sanitizing. We may be asking you to sit in a certain area to help us out.

Again, please make sure to social distance yourself at adoration and confession and make sure you are not in listening range of those celebrating the sacrament or reconciliation. We are asked to have confessions in a well-ventilated space, which is why we are having them in the nave (church proper) and not in the confessionals. For those of you are not able to come, whether you are being asked not to attend Masses or are choosing not to come, we also will be continuing to livestream some of the Masses. The weekly schedule of the bulletin will indicate which Masses will be livestreamed. We will no longer be livestreaming adoration, but feel free to go our websites to watch past adorations while adoration is taking place as scheduled. And if you are able to get out, please join us for adoration, again, maintaining the social distance.

To avoid people coming in contact with each other and to maintain the social distance, on Sunday Masses we will be having ushers seat you beginning from the front and moving to the back. You will not get a choice of what pew you get. When you get to church, they will direct you to your pew. We will fill the

front first and move to the back as more people come. In leaving, you will ushered from the back first and work your way to the front. In other words, if you don't want to sit up front, you better come late. However, the Bishops of our state want us to not exceed 1/3 of the seating capacity of the church. Therefore, you may not want to be too late, because if you do, the plan is right now is to ask you to leave, watch on livestream, and we will reassess the situation for the following weekend. We will be having the pews marked to maintain the 1/3 capacity. The Bishops also encourage people to come on other days of the week instead of Sunday, to spread out the numbers attending Mass. We will only have the main doors of our churches unlocked and sanitize. Please use these doors.

In light of Bishop's May 1st letter, "the space will be thoroughly sanitized before and after each service, including all entryways and doors. Holy water fonts will [continue] to be empty and hymnals removed." However, we will be allowing parishioners to take the missalettes and prayer cards home with them and bring them back each weekend. If you are like me, who forgets things easily, you may want to leave you items in your car so you don't forget them at home. He also went on to say, "Signs will be posted concerning social distancing and sanitation requirements and reminders would be offered. Hand sanitizers will be available at all entry ways. All local safety orders specifically relating to proper face coverings will be followed." In other words, it is up to you if you want to wear a mask during Mass or other church services. However, we are asking our ministers to wear them and then take them off if they are reading. Fr. Christian, Deacon, other extraordinary minister(s) of Holy Communion and I will be wearing masks when we are giving out Holy Communion. We will be going up and down the empty aisles offering Holy Communion to those who are able and want to receive our Lord. If someone wants to donate some homemade masks and have them available for people to take with them, please have them washed and bring to any of the parish offices. **If you would like to lector (read), organist/pianist, usher, sacristan, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion (a Communion distributor), or a server (to avoid close contact with the priests, we only plan on using one server at a Mass to process in and out with the cross and to help with the bells), please let us know at any of the parish offices.**

We will offer Holy Communion during Mass and to those who are choosing or have to stay at home. Please call the parish offices if you or if you know of someone who would like Holy Communion brought to them. We also will be offering Holy Communion on the hand only. To avoid touching the communicants' tongues we will reverently place the Holy Eucharist on the hand and NOT ON THE TONGUE. Speaking of touching, Bishop asks that people "not greet each other with touching." When Mass is over, we ask you to leave and not congregate and visit in the gathering space or anywhere in church. We also will not be singing, because it does not sound very good through the mask, plus if someone is not wearing a mask, they may do more spitting ☺.

Finally, please pray. Remember our churches are open with our Lord present in the tabernacle. Come and pray that our Lord will end this pandemic and help us to know what it is that we should learn from it and how we should grow from it. Again, feel free to use the pandemic prayers that are on the website and were attached to the bulletin a couple of months ago. If you would like a copy, please let us know. As we have been these last couple of weeks, we will be using one of the prayers at the beginning of all of our Masses. May God, with the prayers of our Blessed Mother Mary, help us through this difficult time.