

May 15, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Once again in our Gospel reading from Saint John (14:15-16) we hear Jesus extending words of comfort and reminders of His abiding presence among us. We are not left to be orphans but rather through the commandments are loved as precious children. Through our observance of the Father's commandments, His Son is revealed to us. The commandments are founded on the love that the Father has for the Son, and the love the Son has for the Father. It is the Spirit of Truth that guides our witness to this love as we are drawn into the heavenly revelation.

As institutions and business across the world begin to open up and people start moving around, we must not lose our focus on being cautious and respectful of one another. We wear face coverings and keep proper social distancing to express love and respect for members of our community, an act that we would not have considered a few short months ago. As we begin to extend parish office hours and have public masses, please be mindful of your responsibility to show this form of love. While face masks and distancing are not specifically commandments from God, as Christians we have the obligation to respect one another and to do our part to protect life. What will be revealed through this? Keep your eyes open to see.

On May 20th, the parish office will open for limited hours on the days of normal operation. Members of the staff will be working in the office and remotely. I request that you utilize the phone system or email for any requests from the office. The secretaries will check messages on a regular basis, even from home. At this time anyone who chooses to stop by the office in person will not be permitted to enter the building, so we ask all parishioners to minimize risk by using the other forms of communication.

The diocese has released a statement allowing us to gradually return to public Mass. The first phase begins on May 25 with weekday Masses. Our first gathering for Sunday Mass will be the weekend of Pentecost, May 30-31. The diocese has also provided guidelines for public celebrations, and Fr. Deo and I have been discussing their proper implementation. Each church has its unique challenges, and I will send guidelines next week to help us all in being safe and respectful during this transition. Please keep in mind that the Sunday obligation is still suspended, and that space will be limited as we adhere to social distancing requirements. For example, Saint James has 68 available pews in the main body of the church. With the required 6ft distancing, only 24 pews will be available during Mass. We must also consider the spacing within each pew between individuals/families. We will continue to provide a recorded Mass through the parish website and Facebook.

As we begin to celebrate public Mass, I will be exploring best practices for Baptisms, First Holy Communion, and R.C.I.A. These Sacramental encounters are very personal and best celebrated with the broader community, especially other family members. Unfortunately, that may not be possible in the near future. Working with Colleen Houk and Deacon Danny Bryan, we will make plans for July and August to schedule these celebrations. That is our goal, but only God knows for certain when they will take place.

A couple of requests from me to you. As the sectaries return to work, they will begin working on the parish bulletin again. Due to this pandemic many events have been cancelled or postponed, making material for the bulletin very limited. Throughout this time, if you have received any notes of hope and comfort and would like to share them with the parish, please forward them to the parish office. It would be great to have stories, sayings, poems or the like to add to the bulletin. Secondly, this past week I received word that a staff member of Saint James is terribly ill. Keeping appropriate privacy, I entrust this staff member to your prayers. Let us always remember to pray for all those being affected in a negative way by the pandemic.

We continue to move along on this journey of life, a life that has been forever changed. As we all make life choices, we have faith that Jesus is on this journey with us. As we put into practice new social practices, experience Mass differently, and learn to care for one another, let us recall Jesus' words "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." (Jn 14:18)

Easter Blessing,

Fr. Workman

Commented [SF1]: This is a slippery slope. Without her expressed consent, this could be illegal per HIPAA laws.