May 31, 2020

**Regarding the Resumption of Masses at Holy Cross and Immaculate Conception Parishes**

Dear Parishioners,

I am looking forward to the resumption of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass here at Holy Cross and Immaculate Conception. In doing so, I have some hurdles I have to clear, and am working to do so. Several people have said to me things like, “I went to church in… (fill in the name of the state)… Here’s what they did, and I want to share it.” Much like Coronavirus germs, I would prefer not to have those things shared at this moment.

**Regulatory Matters.** Right now, I am dealing with conflicting regulations, from Delaware and Maryland, as well as the overlaying of Diocesan regulations. I have to put all of these regulations in a blender and produced a tasty regulation-smoothie that satisfies the basic spirit of the regulations and does not turn our Church into a regulatory police state. I want our Church to be a Church. This is not the place for me to add commentary about the heavy hand of State government in the practice of our faith, but I will be addressing that issue in the weeks to come. But right now my concern is to get our Church opened in an appropriate manner, as soon as possible.

**Challenges.** The greatest challenge I have is the one of crowd control; our attendance is fairly limited at both Churches. We have to operate at 30% (less than 1/3) capacity and try to maintain social distancing. In looking at the small-size of Immaculate Conception Church, and the large crowds at Holy Cross, I fear both places being overwhelmed on a Sunday beyond the current capacity limits set by the Diocese (30%). To that end, as we re-open, I am planning to do something different. Some will like it; some won’t. For both, I would advise that this change is not permanent but temporary to work our way back to Sunday Mass.

**Obligation for Sunday Mass remains dispensed.** The assistance that I have making this transition plan work is that the Bishop has dispensed the obligation for Sunday Mass attendance. Thus no one has the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday. On the other side of this issue is the concern that people are hungry for the Eucharist, and I want to give them many options to come, attend Mass, worship God, and receive the Blessed Sacrament. This way everyone can make a weekly visit to the Church and not have to be concerned about large crowds or being turned away.

**Starting Masses.** So, starting on June 8, between Holy Cross and Immaculate Conception, there will be 17 masses a week, but no Sunday Masses. Sunday Masses will continue to be streamed/broadcast online. The Masses we will have will be on weekdays and Saturday mornings. This spread of 17 Masses will
allow the people of the Parish different days and times to attend Mass during a given week to receive the Eucharist, and it will spread the crowd out over a six day period. Many people have expressed to me their trepidation at coming back to Sunday Mass due to potential crowds; this addresses that while we are in this period of transition back to Sunday Masses. The Masses we scheduled will be at times that serve our retired parishioners and our working parishioners.

Temporary Schedule. This temporary schedule will allow time for us to get a handle on the crowd (i.e., the attendance), total numbers, and plan accordingly. I would also expect that, later in the month of June, and certainly by July, many of these regulations will fall by the wayside, and there will be more room to return to normal operations (or at least closer-to-normal). But for a few weeks, I think this is the way forward for our faithful at both parishes.

**Weekday Masses at Holy Cross**
- Monday – 12 noon and 6 p.m. (English)
- Tuesday – 12 noon and 6 p.m. (English)
- Wednesday – 12 noon and 6 p.m. (English)
- Thursday – 12 noon and 6 p.m. (English)
- Friday – 12 noon (English) and 6 p.m. (Spanish)
- Saturday – 9 a.m. (English)

**Weekday Masses at Immaculate Conception**
- Monday – 6 p.m. (English)
- Tuesday – 6 p.m. (Spanish)
- Wednesday – 6 p.m. (English)
- Thursday – 6 p.m. (Spanish)
- Friday – 6 p.m. (English)
- Saturday – 9 a.m. (Spanish)

**Confessions at Holy Cross**
- Tuesday, June 9 – 6:45 to 8:30 p.m.
- Thursday, June 11 – 9 a.m. to 12 noon
- Saturday, June 13 – 9:45 to 11:30 a.m.
- Saturday, June 20 – 9:45 to 11:30 a.m.
- Other times will be announced as needed.

**Confessions at Immaculate Conception**
- Friday, June 5 – 6 to 8 p.m.
- Saturday, June 6 – 9 to 11 a.m.

Basic Guidelines. Those coming into the Church for private prayer are advised that the basic regulations will be similar as for Mass. Also note that disinfectant wipes will be available for sanitizing your seat as you arrive or leave, if needed. We also ask that you bring your own hand sanitizer and/or wipes with you in case we run out.

Basic guidelines, which will also be posted in the Church:

- Those who are 65-or-older, and have compromised health (especially respiratory problems, diabetes, etc.) are advised to stay away for the moment.
- A face covering is to be worn (not on children under 2, not required for children under 13)
- Social distance between you and others remains at six feet, with families and those who share a home being exempt from that requirement (i.e., they can sit together).
- Observe any pew demarcations for sitting.
- At the beginning and end of Mass, there should be no gathering in the Gathering Space (Narthex) of the Church or in the parking lot.
Regarding Reception of Holy Communion. Social distance applies on the communion line (Thus, keep two pew lengths between you and the person in front of you).

If you receive Communion on the hand, line up as per regular, just keeping social distance. Keep your mask on. After you say “Amen,” then step forward to the Priest and receive the host. Then step away (a few steps off to the side), lower your mask, consume the host, then raise your mask again.

If you receive Communion on the tongue, please go to the end of the line. When the first person to receive on the tongue presents himself to the priest, all of those receiving on the tongue will follow the priest over to the statue of Mary (where there will be a washing station for the priest), and they will lower their mask to receive and then raise it back up.

Concluding Thoughts. I know this won’t make everyone happy, but I’m asking you to abide with me through this unusual circumstance. I also know, as I said in the last bulletin, for some, no precautions will be enough to make them feel comfortable gathering in the Church, and for others, every precaution will be an intrusion on their faith — for people in those two groups, you may want to stay away, as I don’t want you being fearful or annoyed in Church. I want you coming here to worship God and focusing on the Lord.

I pray that this temporary situation is something that very soon will be only seen in our rear-view mirror as we speed away from it. I continue to pray for you and ask you to do likewise for me. I remain,

Yours in Christ,

Rev. James Lentini
Pastor

Please note: Also, as a safety precaution, during the time that the Church is opened for private prayer, the bathrooms will not be accessible. However, when Masses are being celebrated, and there are more people in the Church, it is our plan to keep the bathrooms open during those times. In any event, we would very strongly commend you to, please, use the bathroom at home before coming to the Church.