

The day is here. The leaders and guiders of church and state have eased back on the restrictions, and starting Friday evening, once again public worship is permitted in our parish church. Praise God!

### **Now what??**

***Realize that much still depends on you.*** This new virus is still dangerous, and you have responsibility not only for your own health and safety and that of your family or household; but also, you have responsibility toward other believers who will be making their ways back to the Communion we all need to live. So before you come to church, there are questions you have to answer.

### **Should YOU go to Mass?**

You are finally allowed go to Holy Mass, but you do not HAVE to go. Because of the health situation, every bishop in the country, including ours, has removed until further notice the obligation to attend Sunday Mass that normally comes with being Catholic.

### **You should NOT come to Mass if:**

- You are medically vulnerable because of your advanced age, susceptibility to infection (immune-suppressed), or other conditions and “co-morbidities.” (That’s a word most of us didn’t use often three months ago!);
- You have responsibility to care for someone who is vulnerable;
- You have been in recent contact with infected persons, because of work or family;
- You have some harmless condition that nonetheless might frighten other people, for example: violent coughing, or sneezing due to allergies;
- You cannot get through Mass without a trip to the bathroom;
- You are not ready to trust other people;
- You are filled with dread, or your nerves frayed to verge of breakdown, after the long quarantine and daily terrifying news bulletins about the pandemic

*If any of these describe you, **by all means, stay where you think you are safest.** We will continue to live-stream Mass for you each week; starting this Sunday, it will be the 11:00 Mass.*

If you find yourself hesitant to attend Sunday Mass for any of these considerations, but eager to rejoin the Eucharistic communion, let me suggest what my own parents have been doing since churches reopened where they live. They attended Mass on a weekday, when fewer people were present, then watched Sunday Mass on live stream.

### **Who should come to Mass with you?**

Here at Saint Bernadette, we love it when everybody comes, and when everybody comes together. However, you may not want to bring everybody just yet, under the circumstances. You shouldn't bring anybody who meets any of the criteria described above, including especially "cannot get through Mass without a trip to the bathroom;" and you may want to leave someone at home to care for them, or keep them company.

We also, very reluctantly because they are some of our favorite people, suggest that children stay home if they are at a stage when they can't be controlled to keep them safe, and a safe distance from others, including other children; or from interacting with surfaces in a way that is unhygienic. There is no age criterion – babes in arms are fine – but rather behavior and (self-)control.

If there are people in your family who should not join us just yet, it should be easier to "tag-team" parental Mass attendance, again because of the added Masses in the afternoon.

### **Okay, you're coming to Mass! What should you do to get ready, before you leave home?**

#### **Before you come:**

**Print out your music and worship aid.** All missalettes have been removed from the pews, and we are distributing no bulletins or other printed resources. We will send out by email (Flocknote) each Sunday's music resource for you to print at home and bring with you.

**Bring disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer for your own use.** Professionals will be cleaning the church frequently, including between Masses, but you may feel better if you have the option to wipe some surface

or item that catches your attention. We will have hand sanitizer for the priests and helpers in the sanctuary, but we don't have access to a supply large enough to provide for everyone to have what they need.

**Bring your mask.** You will want to wear it most of the time you are in church, and your neighbors will be glad you do.

**Use your own bathroom.** Of course we have bathrooms at church, and we will be working extra hard to clean them frequently, BUT: the single bathroom by the main doors of the church will be reserved for elderly and handicapped ONLY. The *down*stairs bathrooms will be available to everybody, which is precisely why you may prefer to wait until you get home.

**When you arrive:**

Gather up all the items you brought with you, and put on your masks. Enter the church through one of the doors that is propped open, or has an usher standing by it to open it for you.

**Be ready to be turned back.** It is unlikely but still possible that we reach a point at which no further participants should enter the church. Be alert to this (small) possibility, and if you are informed that this is the case, please try again at another Mass later, or on another day. We have added TWO extra Sunday masses to give you more options, and reduce crowding.

**Find your seat(s).** Our church is very large, designed to seat more than 800 people. Safe occupancy according to prescriptions will not be difficult to maintain without issuing tickets or requiring reservations, as some churches will, not least because many parishioners will be staying home for the reasons listed above, at least for the first weeks.

Every other pew in the church will be blocked off. **Where you choose to sit in the "open" pews is the other and even more important part of safe social distancing.**

We live as families or households; we have all been quarantined as families or households; we attend Mass as families or households. Within your group, be as close to one another as you want; but leave safe distance between yourself, or your group, and anyone who is not in your household.

If you have a large family or household group, claim an entire pew (in the nave, they each seat TEN; in the transepts, nine.) Medium-sized (4-5) groups sit together at one end of the pew, leaving the other end of the pew available for someone else to sit. If you are alone, or only a few (1 -3), please leave space and distance for others in the pew with you; and if you arrive first, please sit in the center of the pew, not at the end where someone might have to climb over you past you.

### **How Mass will be different:**

There will be some changes in the sanctuary, such as how many altar servers, where the lector is, and so forth. And receiving Holy Communion will be different; **see my letter “Place at the Table” from last week.** Other than that, some changes will affect you.

Most Masses will have no music; and the Mass with music will have little or no congregational singing. And even though almost everybody will be wearing masks, it will be good to make your responses softly. Loud singing and speaking have been implicated in spraying droplets – yuck!

There will be no offertory collection during Mass. This, too, is for sanitary reasons, not because God cancelled tithing for Covid. You should still make your offering – especially if you’ve missed some months. Ushers will be holding baskets near the doors as you exit, into which you may place your offering.

For reason I hope to be obvious, there will be:

- NO offertory procession with the gifts to be consecrated;
- NO distribution of the Precious Blood in communal chalices;
- NO handshake of peace.

Speaking of exiting, please be cautious and intentional as you exit, and keep your family close. Leave room between yourselves and others until you are out the doors. Linger in your pew until the proper opportunity, and use the extra time to give thanks to God for the Holy Eucharist you just celebrated and received!

Then, once you have left the church, being careful and respectful, at a safe social distance, and enjoy the fellowship of your brothers and sisters in Christ, whom you have not seen in so long.

See you this weekend (WOW does it feel great to write that)!