

*"For everything there
is a time and season..."*

ECCLESIASTES 3:1



Dear Parishioners,

Peace of Christ!

I last wrote to you when we resumed public Masses at the end of June. As we head into Labor Day weekend, it seems like a good time to offer you some updates on our parish.

It has been a joy to welcome so many of you back to Mass, and to see familiar faces--even if behind a mask! -- after a long absence. We will get a better sense of our Mass attendance once the usual summer slowdown is behind us. That will also help us to assess our Mass schedule and how best we can meet the needs of our parishioners with the resources we have. Our capacity right now, as per city guidelines, is 200 persons. All of our Masses are still getting less than half the number of people that we had pre-pandemic. Some Masses are getting 70-80 people, others less than 20. So, there's plenty of room! We still encourage those at high risk to delay their return to Mass, but we warmly welcome everyone who does come and we reassure you that the staff is observing all protocols. You should feel even safer in the basilica than you would in a store or restaurant.

The same assurance applies to Most Precious Blood church, as well. As we re-opened, we made the difficult decision to close the office at Most Precious Blood. This allows us to consolidate resources by handling everything out of one central office. I want to thank Emily DePalo and Eddie Rowe for their many years of service to the parish. They were a pleasure to work with. I am pleased that we are able to continue to offer regular Masses at MPB on Sundays and Wednesdays. Although the annual festival of San Gennaro had to be cancelled this year, there will be a Mass on his feast day, September 19, at 2pm. Seating will be limited.

The summer has been productive sacramentally. I've had the privilege of giving First Holy Communion to five children in our Religious Education program, and baptizing and confirming nine members of our RCIA program. They all waited longer than expected to receive these sacraments, and it was a joy to celebrate these milestones with them.

Our 2020-2021 RCIA program will begin in the second week of September. Father Jason and I will be teaching the classes, and we are opening these to any parishioners who might be interested. Even if you have made your sacraments, this offers a wonderful opportunity to grow deeper in your knowledge of the faith, and to enjoy good Catholic company and conversation. The schedule of classes is listed in our bulletin, and we ask that you let us know ahead of time if you plan to come so that we can prepare accordingly.

Our Religious Education program is set to begin the first Sunday of October. We will be conducting these classes remotely at least through the end of 2020. I want to take this moment to express my gratitude to Tony MacDonnell, who has directed this program for the past eight years. As you saw in the bulletin a few weeks ago, Tony has received a wonderful opportunity to become the Director of Campus Ministry at Divine Mercy University in Ashburn, Virginia, and he will assist in nearby parishes as well. This position will allow Tony to live out his consecrated life in a fuller way. On behalf of all of us at the parish, I wish Tony many blessings in this new ministry. I very much want to continue and build upon the incredible job Tony has done with our family program.

On that note, I'm delighted to welcome our new Coordinator of Religious Education, Mr. Eric Roginek. Eric has a strong background in education and organization, having worked for many years with children and parents. He is very much on fire with the faith, and will bring his energy and enthusiasm to our program.

On another staff note, Fr. Daniel Ray, LC, who has been in residence here for the past year, has been elected by his religious community as the local superior. This is a fine testament to Fr. Daniel's leadership and ability. He will continue to help us out on Sundays, mostly with our Spanish Mass. It has been a pleasure having him live here this past year, and I will certainly miss seeing him around as often.

I want to take a moment to thank so many of you who have continued to support the parish throughout this ordeal. Our live streamed Masses continue to be well received, and we have maintained our weekend collection amount. The digital giving options that we introduced back in the winter were well timed and they have certainly helped us to keep going. As you may be aware, our parish is unusual in that the weekend collection accounts for only 20 percent of our operating budget. Much of our income derives from tours and rentals of our buildings (film shoots, sports leagues, etc.). That income disappeared, even as the costs of maintaining six historic buildings remain. I am grateful for your continued generosity in these difficult times.

The basilica is your spiritual home, and our doors are open whenever you are able to return. In the meantime, let's continue to pray for an end to this pandemic, and for all those affected by it. You are all in my daily prayers, and be assured that our clergy and staff are here to serve you in every way we can.

God bless you and your loved ones,
Father Graebe

This is the day the *Lord* has made;
Let us *rejoice* and be glad in it.

PSALM 118:24