

Message from Monsignor Benwell

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace and all good. With this note, I'd like to call your attention to a couple matters.

At the **11:15 Mass** this **Sunday, May 23**, the parish will celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Deacon Walter Maksimik's ordination into the Order of Deacons. (Walter was ordained on May 5, 1996 and ordained with him was St. Mary's own Deacon Henry Albert.) Walter came to St. Mary's at the beginning of Advent 2019, just a few months before the pandemic began, and so has not had the opportunity he might have to be fully immersed in the St. Mary's family. Still, his humble presence and thoughtful and inventive preaching has been a grace for our parish. We congratulate Deacon Walter on this significant milestone; we thank his wife, Loretta, for her faithful support of his ministry; and we wish them and their family abundant blessings in the future.

* * *

Last weekend, I spoke at all the Masses about the most recent developments in the pandemic as they affect St. Mary's. For those who missed my remarks, following is the substance of what I said, with some elaboration.

Obviously, developments are moving rapidly and that can sometimes be very confusing, as we hear of restrictions being loosened or tightened in different parts of the country. As far as what takes place our own church: I will continue to be guided by the instructions that come from our bishop, instructions that are based on consultation with the other bishops of New Jersey, with our Catholic hospital (St. Peter's University Hospital, New Brunswick) and with our state health officials.

While the most recent instruction leaves certain matters to the pastor's discretion, some directives remain in place: diligence is to be shown about cleaning commonly touched surfaces; social distancing is to be maintained; and masks (covering the mouth *and* nose) are to be always worn in the church. (A priest friend recently made a very perceptive observation: "Masks are the concrete expression of the commandment, 'Love thy neighbor.'") We are fortunate that the size of our church and the numbers attending Sunday Masses allow us to continue to keep every other pew open. The distribution of Holy Communion returns to its regular place in the Communion Rite.

The dispensation from the obligation to participate in Mass on Sunday remains in effect. We will continue to live-stream Masses and distribute Holy Communion in front of the church after Mass.

Let us not forget there are many in our parish who have not yet been able to be vaccinated, many who want to worship in person whose health is compromised, and many who remain very anxious this virus that continues to take lives. Let this not be about *our*

particular feelings, but about the *common* good. What did Our Lord say in our gospel reading two Sundays ago? “*This I command you: love one another*” (Jn 15:17). Here at St. Mary’s, let us love one another.

Be assured of my daily prayers for you and your families.

Msgr. Benwell