

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

We are SO looking forward to BEING BACK IN CHURCH in two weeks and in preparation for that return, the church has been cleaned and sanitized, measured and marked, taped and signed SO that you will be protected. You have heard me say this again and again, and you have read about it over these past many weeks about how our loyal staff has done wonders to get St. Mary ready once again. There is a little bit more to do, but I want you to know that we have your health and safety in mind as begin to open wide the doors of our sacred spaces!

My recent email outlines many of the CHANGES, yes CHANGES that NEED and MUST be in place and I will repeat them here.

Attendance will be limited

1 Government regulations remain in place. At this time, the bishops are asking for far less than a 50% of total capacity. St. Mary Church can accommodate 600-800 people, however, the varying length pews ALLOW for a maximum of 3 people in a pew (with the exception of a family) and in order to maintain the six feet apart regulation, we will be seated in every OTHER pew; which brings capacity to 100, at Mass. Pews will be marked accordingly.

Physical distancing will be the norm

2 St. Mary HAS a specific seating pattern that allows for a minimum of six feet of physical distancing on all sides *(with the exception of a family)*. Our pews will be marked accordingly and you may not be able to sit where you sat for each liturgy pre-pandemic. IT IS ALSO REQUIRED that everyone in attendance wears a face mask and if you are sick or symptomatic, please stay home.

Mass will look, sound, and feel different

3 The precautions that were in place in early March will continue with adjustments, intended to limit the possibility for passing on the coronavirus. On Sundays, everyone **MUST** wear a mask; there will be hand sanitizers at the specific doors of the church and seating is limited to 3 people in every OTHER pew (so marked). There will be: no holy water in the fonts, no offertory procession, no passing of the collection baskets, no Sign of Peace, Holy Communion will be in the hand, no distribution of the Cup, and no singing by the assembly, because all missalettes have been removed. Yes, many of these are unfortunate and go against worship expectations, but remember, the guiding principle in making these liturgical sacrifices is our respect for others' lives and the promotion of the common good.

The general dispensation from the Sunday and holy day obligation will continue

4 Many of our faithful Catholics are in high-risk categories, are fearful, or have family members with compromised health. In addition, we know that St. Mary Church is limited to 100 people in attendance according to the government and Catholic Conference regulations, so not everyone who wants to attend Sunday Mass will be able to do so. Perhaps you might **CONSIDER** attending a weekday Mass as the number of attendees is lower; but always keeping in mind that the general dispensation from the Sunday obligation is still in effect. At this time, we invite you to continue to pray at home with your families and to participate in livestream liturgies offered here and throughout the Diocese of Cleveland and to reach out to your fellow parishioners via telephone, mail, or internet to stay connected.

The pandemic is not over and attending Mass will not be free of risk of contracting COVID-19

5 We have all been educated on increased cleaning and sanitation practices and St. Mary has been and will continue to be cleaned and sanitized according to the proper procedures. Attendance **IS** limited and subject to reasonable safety requirements (*required face masks and social distancing*); nevertheless, anyone who attends a public gathering, including a public Mass or other liturgy, must recognize that there will always be a risk that they could contract COVID-19 despite all of the precautions that will be taken to reduce that risk. As such, individuals who are in high-risk categories are strongly encouraged to not attend Mass at this time. And again, if anyone is feeling sick or experiencing symptoms of illness PLEASE stay at home. We should have absolute trust in God's divine providence as well as make every effort to follow proper guidelines.

Let's all strive for progress, not perfection

6 There will be challenges and frustrations as we are asked to change patterns of worship that have come to mean a great deal to us personally and spiritually. All of us will have to make sacrifices in order to preserve everyone's right to life and to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The last thing that anyone wants is to cause the illness or death of their priest or a fellow parishioner, or to contribute to a rebound effect that would cause public worship to be suspended again.

It can't be overstated that we want to keep YOU safe and the best way to prevent the virus is by adhering to these directives. PLEASE take them to heart and PRAY and then PRAY some more for all to be healthy, wise and safe.

In today's Gospel, Jesus offers to his disciples his Farewell Discourse reminding them of his abundant and faithful love, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always."* His kind and generous words are so endearing to them and as we are moving SLOWLY to open our churches, we need to hold his words closely in our hearts as we put his words into our actions.

When we gather as a faithful crowd, we will be changed and different ourselves – certainly from the outside. But on the inside, this is where the real change begins. We need to put His words and His spirit and His love into our mind, heart and spirit, and in spite of what others say and do, you, me, we need to put the directives FORWARD as the way, the truth for our life! And we are not sure of how long this will be in effect, but it IS our current state and for our safety and health acting in this manner IS our best defense.

I **NEED** to meet with **ALL Ushers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors and Clergy** to "instruct" them in the proper procedures as we move forward, as all pastors are obliged to institute proper protocols to be "in place" for the protection and care of you, as well as all of us.

In addition, I **NEED 6 VOLUNTEERS** to help properly clean and sanitize the church **AFTER every weekend Mass**, and everyone will get a short instruction as to the details. If you are healthy and not immunocompromised in any way and would like to put your name forward to help, please email or call the office, leaving your name, number and after WHICH weekend Mass you would be willing to help. With at least **6 volunteers** after each weekend Mass, the time should be no more than ½ hour to clean and sanitize the Church space for the next Mass.

Jesus loved his disciples so much and I am sure he felt sad as he bid them farewell, as we hear from John's Gospel. But he had incredible trust in them to put forth His words and His ways into the world. May it be the same for us! Be well. Stay strong. Pray and then pray some more!

I am meeting with Finance Council this week to detail the past few months and WHAT the next few months will look like. Your continued financial support is THE way for us to stay strong and sustainable. THANK YOU for everything you do to support us!

thank you!

It's my *broken record* time to say again **THANK YOU** for signing up for our **eGiving**. It's safe and convenient and a sure way to stay financially strong! THANKS! Next week we celebrate the Ascension! **C U in 2!**