

Pastor's Corner
Coronavirus Precautions and St. Joseph Altar

Coronavirus Precautions. As I announced at all masses last weekend, we are implementing several precautions in the face of the coronavirus: the temporary suspension of the communion cup; the exchange of the sign of peace without physical contact (e.g. no shaking hands); the emptying of the holy water fonts (although you can get holy water for personal use at the main holy water dispenser in church near the Chapel). These measures will be relaxed when it is prudent to do so.

If you are sick or experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness, you are dispensed from attending mass by church law, and out of charity, should not attend mass. If you have celiac disease and cannot receive a gluten host, inform the priest know before mass begins. Let us continue to ask God for protection from the Coronavirus and for wisdom as to how to respond to it. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

St. Joseph Altar. Our Parish St. Joseph Altar will be open for public viewing in the School Auditorium on Wednesday and Thursday, March 18 and 19. On St. Joseph's Day (Thursday), there will be a Mass honoring the saint at 8 am in Church, followed by a reenactment of the Tupa-Tupa drama in the Auditorium, and the public feeding from 11 am – 2 pm in the Cafeteria. But why do we have a St. Joseph Altar anyway?

Every year in Sicily, on the Feast Day of St. Joseph, Catholics give thanks to their Patron Saint for interceding during a famine in the Middle Ages. According to tradition, there was a severe drought and all the crops were dying. The people prayed to St. Joseph for help. The rains came, the crops grew and the people were saved from starvation. In gratitude, they set up food tables for the poor in their towns. From this beginning, the custom developed of erecting altars annually on the Feast Day of St. Joseph to recall his intercession and to give thanks.

A typical St. Joseph Altar includes religious items, photos of deceased loved ones, candles, flowers, fava beans, and special foods, cakes, breads and cookies. Because the feast occurs in Lent, there is no meat on the altar. Traditionally, the altar and altar food have a symbolic value. Some altar breads are symbols of St. Joseph's work and are shaped as carpentry tools. A baked fish represents the miracle of the multiplication, and wine the miracle at Cana. Fava beans adorn the altar, because during the drought, they alone survived and kept many from starvation. The custom of the St. Joseph Altar came to New Orleans with the Sicilian immigrants who settled here in the 1800s. See the bulletin for additional details about our Altar and come see one of the best altars around.

God bless,
Fr. Joe