

Dear Parishioners,

The world-wide COVID-19 Pandemic is gripping our collective senses these days in ways unfamiliar to us for generations. We wonder sometimes if all is lost, if the virtue of hope is useless, if God has abandoned us or even cares. The great Apostle Paul and Preacher of the wide and unconditional embrace of God's love and mercy gives us a framework in which to place our lives during these difficult moments: **"what will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? ... yet in all things we are more than conquerors because of Him who has loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels or principalities, neither the present nor the future will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,"** (Romans 8:35ff). Bearing these words in our minds and hearts we move forward, knowing we are loved and sustained by God and that we must love and sustain each other as well.

Regarding our faith life at Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish I feel it is important to keep you abreast of situations as they unfold. By now you are well aware that all Sunday and weekday liturgies have been suspended. The announced intentions are being honored by me at private Masses. Funeral liturgies can still be celebrated with immediate family only, capping the participation at 25 which *includes* the celebrant, altar servers, music director and cantor. Families have the option to preclude the Funeral liturgy and proceed to the cemetery for the Rite of Committal with the assurance of a Memorial Mass for the deceased loved one once the crisis is passed. Baptisms may be celebrated as well, noting again the maximum number of 10 and utilizing the practice of social distancing. However, I am disinclined to celebrate them at this time.

Furthermore, the Rosary is prayed daily for you and your families after the private Masses of the week. Included with this prayer devotion is *A Prayer in Time of Pandemic* which you will find with this letter. Currently the Chapel of the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph is open for personal prayer from 8:00AM to 2:00PM (entrance on rectory side of church only), keeping in mind the restricted number of 10 people and the absolute adherence to social distancing. This is a concession made by the Bishop but could change unfortunately to a complete prohibition by civil and ecclesiastical officials as the situation remains fluid.

The Diocese of Worcester will be assigning specifically trained priests as designated ministers of the sick and dying. The Bishop is urging other priests to remain in their rectories and maintain telephone, e-mail and social media contact with parishioners. Once the lists of these priests become available referrals will be made for those in need of the pastoral care of the sick and dying.

The Bishop has mandated the closing of all rectories for regular business. Should anyone need information, documents or clarification of issues they are advised to telephone the rectory at **508 634-5435** or by email (office@sacredheartmilford.org). The weekly bulletin will be available on the parish web site only.

Finally, some have asked me about parish offerings and donations. That's a healthy sign of love and concern! Currently we are all anxious right now about our personal situations. I trust in God and I trust in you and your generous goodness. If at all possible, I humbly ask that your weekly contributions be sent to the parish by mail regularly as well as monthly and automatic banking withdrawals as one is accustomed. Without your financial support we will struggle. I am most

deeply and primarily concerned about our dedicated and selfless employees who rely on their weekly salaries and the benefits of their health care that we provide. I promise you, as I have shown throughout my service as your Pastor for these seventeen years, to be a faithful and wise steward of your parish offerings and donations, making sacrifices wherever warranted.

This situation in our lives, our families, our country, our world and our Church is unprecedented. Our faith in the Lord will see us through this crisis. His love will calm our fears. Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Christ and Our Lady of Hope, may God's rich and manifold blessings fill your hearts.

Your friend in Christ Jesus,