

EASTER 2020

Dear St. Charles Parishioners:

Easter 2020 is a very different experience: no days of special ceremonies, no crowded churches, no lily-decorated sanctuaries, and limited travel/family gatherings. But one thing does remain the same. Every pastor is required to offer one Mass per weekend for his parishioners. That I have done faithfully, for you, for almost thirty-three years. So Mass this Easter Sunday—livestreamed to you at 11:00am—will be for your intentions. For most of us, holiday times are sentimental. The older we get, the more we remember those we have known and loved who are no longer with us. May the promise of the Resurrection be fulfilled for them!

Most priests my age have served in several parishes. I have served only two parishes: my first seven years at St Ambrose in Brunswick and then thirty-seven years here at St Charles Borromeo in Parma. Two Bishops of Milan in Italy have been declared saints: Ambrose of the fifth century and Charles Borromeo of the sixteenth century! So I have a certain devotion to both. I had long hoped to travel to Italy and visit Milan as well as Parma. That dream came true in 2017. I was privileged to say Mass at the tomb of St Ambrose and then visit some significant “Ambrosian” sites.

I had heard that our church had some architectural features based on the Cathedral in Parma, Italy. The story was true. The baldachino, above the altar in our church, is a duplicate for the one in the Parma Cathedral—right down to the lions on the back wall with the marble pillars above them! I look forward to again celebrating the Sacraments in our beautiful church. I was told St Charles visited Parma while on his way to his installation as Bishop of Milan!

St Charles Borromeo is still revered. I visited many sites from Charles's life, including his tomb in the great Milan Cathedral. St Charles had a special interest in the religious education of the young, in the formation of new priests, in the care of the poor and sick, and in the proper care of souls. He also fostered a love of the liturgy and of Church music. Our parish continues to emphasize those ministries.

More particular for our current situation, I learned that St Charles also had to deal with a deadly and widespread plague-like illness. Although medical knowledge was then very primitive, Charles was advised that “social distancing” and “stay at home” would be keys to halting the illness. He suspended the celebration of Mass, forbade gatherings, and mandated that people stay with their families. He encouraged devotions and prayers in the “domestic church” of individual homes. He distributed booklets of prayers, that could be said privately, until parish life could resume. We are following Charles's example: stay home, take care of one another and pray together with Mass online and practice the other devotions offered to you electronically.

So the life of Charles, our parish patron saint from the sixteenth century, has something to teach us in the twenty-first century. St Charles successful approach in dealing with that terrible illness in Milan was later followed elsewhere. When a plague descended upon Vienna, the intercession and model of St Charles was successfully invoked. In 1737, Vienna built the magnificent “Charles Church” in gratitude.

Seeking relief during the epidemic, St Charles encouraged his parishioners to pray daily the Regina Coeli (“Queen of Heaven”) from Easter until Pentecost at 6:00am, 12:00noon, and 6:00pm. I encourage you to do the same for the next fifty days:

*Queen of heaven rejoice, Alleluia!
For He whom thou didst bear, Alleluia!
Has Risen as He said, Alleluia!
Pray for us to God, Alleluia!
Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, Alleluia!
Because the Lord is truly risen, Alleluia!*

Let us pray. O God, who by the Resurrection of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, granted joy to the whole world, grant, we beseech You, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may lay hold of the joys of eternal life. Through Christ Our Lord. AMEN!