

Dear Parishioners,

I write to you today in order to update you on some important changes forthcoming in the celebration of Sunday Mass. First, as you know, a dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass had been granted for all Catholics in the Diocese of Duluth when the COVID-19 pandemic hit last March of 2020. This dispensation will be lifted, or canceled as of next Thursday, July 1, 2020, which means that Catholics will once again, in observance of the Third Commandment of the Ten Commandments, be required to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation starting the weekend of July 3-4, 2021, unless a legitimate reason excuses them. A list of such reasons related to the pandemic can be found in the letter from the Bishops of Minnesota that I emailed to all of you a few weeks ago, and this same letter will also be inserted into this weekend's bulletin. Again, this is good news! Worshipping together on Sundays and Holy Days is the center of faith, because the Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith! As always, if you have any questions about this, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I also wish to announce the return of two practices at Mass that had been suspended during the pandemic. Beginning on the weekend of July 31-August 1, 2021, the deacon or I will resume the invitation for us to offer a sign of peace to one another before the reception of Holy Communion. Now, as we resume this practice, I would like to take this opportunity to remind us of what the Church asks of us and expects of us in this exchange of peace at Mass. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which is the official guide for the proper celebration of Holy Mass in the Catholic Church, says this:

“As for the actual sign of peace to be given, the manner is to be established by the Conferences of Bishops in accordance with the culture and customs of the peoples. However, it is appropriate that each person, in a sober manner, offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest” (GIRM, no. 82).

Two things to note- first, the method of exchanging peace is flexible. In times past, it was often through a handshake to those around us. However, *it does not have to be a handshake*. I would ask that all of us be sensitive to those of us who may not yet be comfortable with the idea of shaking hands. The sign of peace certainly can be a handshake, but it can also be a smile and a nod toward the person, while saying “peace be with you.” Please, everyone, allow for others to exchange a sign of peace in the way that they are most comfortable, and remember that this is a time for unity, not division.

Secondly, please note that the Church states that the exchange of a sign of peace should be conducted in a sober manner, and only to those who are near to you. Thus it's an important reminder to us that our exchanging of peace should not be raucous or loud. This is not the time for loud greetings, bear hugs, or slapping each other on the back. It is to be a sincere but sober exchange of peace. And, our exchange of peace should only be to those in our immediate vicinity- those at our sides, in front of us and behind us. The Church does not envision us leaving our place to greet multiple people in other parts of the Church or attempting to exchange peace with as many people as possible. Remember, we need to offer kind and genuine peace to one another while also remaining reverent to our Lord who is truly present on the altar.

The second practice that we will be resuming on that same weekend of July 31-August 1, 2021, is to once again offer the Precious Blood of Christ to the faithful by means of receiving from a common chalice. However, as we resume this practice, I have decided that we will only offer the Precious Blood at the *Sunday morning Mass* at each parish. The reasons for this decision are several. First, it is often difficult, especially during summer months, to schedule the necessary four to six extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion each weekend. Second, I am uncertain, due to the effects of the pandemic, of how many people will desire to receive the Precious Blood from the chalice, and therefore would like to observe how frequently it is received over the next several months. Finally, Sunday morning Mass is typically viewed as the “high Mass” of the weekend, and so it is fitting that if the Precious Blood is only going to be offered at one of the two Masses on a given weekend, that it be offered on Sunday morning. Please remember as well that when we receive only the Body of Christ, we still receive the entirety of the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus we do not receive any further graces by also receiving the Precious Blood at Mass- we simply participate more fully in the sign value of the Last Supper.

Also, with in-person gatherings once again being held, I would like to announce that I will be hosting a parish “town-hall” meeting and listening session to which all parishioners are invited and strongly encouraged to attend on Sunday, July 25, 2021, after the 8:30am Sunday Morning Mass. The purpose of this meeting is for us to discuss several important projects at the parish that need our attention, for me to explain the nature of these projects, and for you to offer your input and votes on which projects you would like to address first. As a preview, there are three primary projects that need attention- we need to discuss the reinstallation of our stained glass windows somewhere in the Church; we need to discuss the creation and installation of a religious symbol or image on the upper front exterior wall of the Church, and we need to discuss the possibility of a new lighting system in the Church to replace the current one which is falling into disrepair. We will be serving refreshments and goodies at this meeting, so please come down to the social hall after Mass on Sunday, July 25, to have a bite to eat, a cup of coffee and some conversation about the needs of our parish.

As a final announcement, please note that I will be out of the office, on vacation, from next Friday afternoon, July 2nd, through the following Saturday morning, July 10, 2021. Father Lyons will be covering any sacramental emergencies during that time.

As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. May God bless you!

Fr. Steve Laflamme