

Public Masses to resume June 13

Governor Murphy has said that the indoor gathering limit may be raised by June 12, thereby allowing reasonably sized religious services to resume. For Catholics who have been hungering for the Eucharist, the date is appropriate: Sunday, June 14 is the Feast of Corpus Christi (the Body and Blood of Christ). Bishop Sullivan will therefore permit public Mass to resume.

Like your trips to the grocery store, Mass won't be the same. The protocol required by the diocese, keeping with public health guidelines, is burdensome. Our individual responses to the pandemic vary considerably. As long as no injustice is done (injustice must always be opposed), I believe that Christians who are not very concerned about the pandemic should be considerate of those who are. If the suspension of public Mass was an injustice, it is now being made right. Now, I ask those of you who are frustrated with the restrictions to bear them patiently.

Most importantly, the Mass schedule must change. At both churches, the Sunday morning schedule had Masses starting every 90 minutes. That is not enough time for the pandemic protocol, so Masses will now start every 2 hours.

Pandemic Mass Schedule

Our Lady Star of the Sea Church

Sat 4:15 PM English
7 PM Spanish
Sun 7:30 AM English
9:30 AM Spanish
12 Noon English
2:30 PM Spanish
6:30 PM Vietnamese

St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church

Sat 4 PM English
Sun 10:30 AM English

Even after June 12, **Sunday Mass will not be obligatory** and, in fact, those who are sick and those in the high-risk categories for COVID-19 are asked to stay home.

If you choose to come to Mass, **you will need a reservation**. I know it sounds crazy, but it will prevent overcrowding and turning people away after the church limits have been reached. You can reserve by going to www.acatholic.org/reserve or calling the parish office (609-345-1878).

Pandemic Protocol for Mass

- Mass is limited to 50 people, inclusive of the priest(s), liturgical ministers, and “pandemic protocol” volunteers
- Households must reserve a pew before coming to the church. As a general rule, only members of the same household can sit together in a pew.
- Masks are required for everyone except children under 2. CDC guidelines also exempt those who have difficulty breathing, but they probably belong to one of the categories of people asked to stay home.
- Bathrooms will not be open. This is no time for public bathrooms. Their use unnecessarily endangers people, including volunteers and parish employees who would have to continually disinfect them.
- There is virtually no movement in the church. Upon arrival, ushers will direct your household to a pew. Remember the priests who’ve railed against leaving immediately after Communion? That is now required. (Yes, these are strange times!) Therefore, the only time you will leave your pew is to receive Communion, after which you will immediately exit the church. People are not permitted to stand in the back of the church and children are not permitted to run around the church.
- Different doors for the entrance and the exit. All other doors will be closed.

Some specifically liturgical protocol:

- No entrance procession, no offertory procession, no recession
- No altar servers
- We will begin with only the priests offering Communion; depending on “demand,” we might include ministers of Communion later
- The collection will still take place during the Mass as usual
- Communion is given after Mass (after the final blessing). Ushers will direct the Communion line pew-by-pew. Once you reach the priest, you may receive Communion, but everyone must then continue to follow the traffic flow through the exit.
- Of course, no distribution of the Blood of Christ until further notice
- Limited singing. No choirs until further notice; only an organist and cantor in the choir loft are permitted. Both the number of songs and the number of verses will be limited.

More “bad news”:

- The priests have been celebrating private Masses in St. Michael’s, but public Masses will not resume there until further notice
- No public weekday Masses until further notice
- We are not opening the churches for private prayer until further notice
- Confession remains by appointment; it will not be offered before Mass. For those who want anonymity, please call the parish office to arrange this with the secretary.

And some good news, starting June 13, the following can resume:

- Pastoral visits to homebound parishioners – only the priests at first, then Communion ministers – speak to Sister Celeste or Laura about scheduling a visit with one of the priests
- Baptisms resume (outside of Mass, one child at a time)
- Weddings and funerals according to the protocol above for Mass

These decisions, made by the parish staff at a two-hour meeting this past Wednesday, are sad for many of our parishioners but are guided by required “pandemic protocol” and our desire to reduce both the costs of continuous disinfection and the risks to employees and volunteers posed by such work. Keep in mind the risks are not only physical (the risk of infection and serious illness) but legal, i.e. the risk of lawsuits if a case is made the parish failed to take every precaution.

In these circumstances, it’s natural for us to direct our anger against someone or something. Some of you have heard me make mention of a bumper sticker in a homily. I’d like to share that again:

ANGRY?
NEED A WEAPON?
PRAY THE ROSARY

At least, don’t forget to offer up a Hail Mary for justice and peace in our nation.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jon Thomas
Pastor

June 1
Feast of Mary, Mother of the Church