

May 22, 2020

Dear Friends,

It has been more than ten weeks since we last gathered for a public celebration of the Mass. Today I have the pleasure of writing to inform you that our “fast” is coming to an end. As I wrote in an earlier Flocknote, we are planning to begin celebrating public Masses at Jesus the Divine Word on Tuesday, May 26<sup>th</sup>. The parish staff and volunteers have been working very hard to establish a plan that does everything we reasonably can to make this a safe reopening for those who are able to attend.

The seriousness of this pandemic dictates that we follow the guidelines and safety measures given by state and local authorities, health officials and the Archdiocese of Washington. Therefore, please understand that the logistics and schedule required to offer public Masses under these guidelines will be very different from the days prior to the quarantine. That said, the Mass is still the “source and summit” of our lives. It is still our gathering for prayer with and in Christ. It is the primary way we express our identity as Church, an identity rooted in joy, expressed in joy for Christ’s life-saving death and resurrection. Please keep this in mind while reading the following instructions to facilitate our smooth reopening.

**To begin, allow me to remind you that the dispensation from Sunday Mass and holy days of obligation remains in effect until further notice. I remind you because some may have to make the decision to remain at home even as we offer public Masses.** This would include those with COVID-19 or exposed to it, as well as those with upper respiratory or flu like symptoms or underlying medical conditions, the sick, the elderly, those who are living with or in the presence of any individual at risk, or those that still do not feel comfortable being in a public setting. When in doubt, out of charity for others, please stay home.

**Weekday Masses will be celebrated Tuesdays through Friday at 8:00 AM Beginning on May 26<sup>th</sup> in the church.** Since weekday Masses usually have a smaller attendance than Sunday, there will be no electronic sign-ups for them at this time. However, if weekday Masses become larger than anticipated, we will implement electronic sign-up for them as well. Doors for the weekday Masses will be opened at 7:30 AM and social distancing will still be in place.

**Beginning the weekend of May 30/31 – Pentecost – Sunday Masses** will resume. During Phase I of re-opening the Sunday Mass schedule will be as follows:

- **Saturday at 5:00 PM in the church (doors opening at 4:30 PM)**
- **Sunday at 10:00 AM in the church (doors opening at 9:30 AM)**

When coming to church please plan to arrive early, no later than ten minutes before the start of Mass and to keep socially distanced from other households. **Everyone will be seated by an usher when arriving, so please allow the extra time needed to be seated and please understand that you cannot choose where you will sit.**

Given the occupancy restrictions, we are only able to **accommodate 90 parishioners per Mass**. For the purpose of social distancing the parish will use electronic sign-ups to facilitate this process. Parishioners are being asked to sign-up at the parish website [www.jesusdivineword.org](http://www.jesusdivineword.org) by the end of office hours on the Wednesday prior to the weekend Mass.

Seating will begin thirty minutes before the start of Mass. Please remain in your vehicles until the doors open to enter the church and please do not congregate by the entrance before or after Masses.

**We will continue to live-stream the 10:00 AM Mass with a re-airing at 12:00 Noon.** Please visit the parish website to connect with the live-streamed Mass.

Confessions will be heard on **Saturdays from 3:30 – 4:30 PM** using the vesting sacristy and my office where social distancing can be maintained. Please enter the building using the doors in front of the parish office.

**Everyone will be required to wear a face mask for the entirety of Mass.** If you choose to wear protective gloves, I ask you to please remove them prior to receiving Communion. Everyone is also being asked to **use hand sanitizer** prior to entering the church, so please bring some with you. Please note, too, that **the restrooms will not be available during the Phase I reopening.**

Only the priest, deacon, reader(s) and cross-bearer will process into church at the beginning of Mass. Only the priest and deacon will be in the sanctuary. The reader(s) and cross-bearer will be seated with the congregation in reserved seats. There will be no altar servers at this time. A single cantor will lead us in music with no congregational singing.

To reduce transmission of the virus all Breaking Bread hymnals have been removed from the church. Sunday Readings can be found at [www.usccb.org/bible](http://www.usccb.org/bible) I invite you to use your electronic device to access the readings during this time.

At the time of the Preparation of the Gifts and Altar, collection baskets will not be passed. Instead, **offertory baskets will be available for contributions at the entrance to the church.** Please place your offertory in the basket upon arrival at church. Online Giving is another option and is available through the parish website.

For health reasons, we will not physically exchange the Sign of Peace during Mass nor greet one another prior to the start of Mass.

When it comes time for the Communion Rite, Catholics present in a state of grace are welcome to process forward to receive. Communion will be distributed under one form, the Body of Christ. Those who have health concerns and do not wish to receive the Eucharist may make an Act of Spiritual Communion. The procession will look much different from pre-COVID-19 days. Instructions will be given at church, but please note, however, that we will not be using the center aisle to receive Communion.

When approaching to receive the Eucharist, please remain six feet from others in the line and from the minister. When it is your time to receive, keep your mask on and remain six feet away from the minister while he shows the Host and says, “The Body of Christ” (there will be tape on the floor). After you respond “Amen,” approach the minister.

Out of love for your brothers and sisters, and out of kind concern for the vulnerable and our ministers, I am asking everyone to receive Communion in the hand as a temporary measure. I recognize this will be a sacrifice for those who prefer to receive on the tongue. However, it is a legitimate practice attested to in our Catholic Tradition since the ancient Church. To receive on the hand, place one hand under the other while keeping your fingers together. After receiving the Eucharist step six feet away from the minister, and then carefully loosen your facial covering/mask, consume the Eucharist, and replace your facial covering/mask. If the minister accidentally touches anyone’s hand, he will cease distribution to immediately disinfect his own hands.

At the conclusion of Mass, the ushers will dismiss rows beginning from the back to the front of the church. As you return to your car, please keep socially distanced from others as you leave. After the last pew is dismissed we will be sanitizing the pews and seating areas, as well as common area surfaces.

I would ask you to please be patient as we implement this plan and to understand that we will make any changes deemed necessary to assure the safety of those attending, while also recognizing the importance of making the sacraments available. These procedures are issued out of love and concern for everyone entrusted to my care. Thank you for understanding, your cooperation, and your continued prayers. You are always being remembered in my prayers and Masses.

Peace and blessings,

*Fr. John*

Rev. John T. Dakes  
Pastor