

May 19, 2020

Dear Friends:

I have the opportunity to share some exciting news. I have to admit it also makes me nervous. We have received permission from our Bishop to move ahead and distribute Holy Communion outside of Mass, beginning this Sunday, May 24. We will follow strict guidelines to ensure that proper respect and reverence is given to the Eucharist and the highest standards maintained for everyone's safety.

Before we get into the process of how Communion will be distributed, it is important to note that no one should feel obligated to come to church to receive the Eucharist. Those who are for one reason or more considered "high risk" or living with someone who is classified as such should continue to remain at home. In a spirit of Christian charity, anyone who has flu-like symptoms or recently been in contact with someone diagnosed with the coronavirus should not come to receive Communion.

The obligation we have as Catholics is to attend Mass on Sunday, but our Bishop has dispensed us from this obligation. This dispensation will continue until deemed no longer necessary by our Bishop. After that time, however, individuals may continue to receive a dispensation if – for their safety or the safety of others – it is advisable they not attend Mass.

As the Saints have taught significant graces are received when one makes a spiritual Communion: ***"When you do not receive Communion and do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual Communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed upon you."*** (Saint Teresa of Jesus.) As many have been participating in this practice throughout the history of the Church, its value should continue to be emphasized and practiced.

However our Bishop, after careful prayer and consolation, appreciates the significant sacrifice made when we are unable to receive the most precious Body of Christ. He understands that many are struggling with their faith by not having this spiritual nourishment physically. As opportunities for testing have increased, new practices are being employed to keep people safe from the coronavirus, and businesses are being reopened, he believes in a controlled setting the Eucharist can safely be offered outside of Mass. These directives are also meant to preserve the respect and dignity the Eucharist deserves.

The Church's liturgical norms for providing Communion to the sick and homebound are applicable in unusual circumstances, such as our current pandemic. This is not a substitute for Mass and those receiving Communion should participate in Mass by viewing it as they have been. Again I want to emphasize: **no one should feel obligated to come to church to receive Communion; in fact because of age or underlying health reasons, many should not.**

At Saint Patrick Parish, Communion will be distributed beginning Sunday, May 24, in this way:

1. We will begin distribution of Communion at 8 AM and continue until all who desire to receive Communion have had the opportunity.

2. It is preferred that you sign up for a specific time to come to church by going to <http://www.slyreply.com/app/sheets/ve2k52w3xzbw/>. If you do not have access to a computer, you may schedule a time by calling 715-381-5120, extension 101. (You will need to leave a message with your phone number and your call will be returned.)
3. Eight people will enter the church every ten minutes to receive Communion.
4. Do not arrive at church more than ten minutes before your scheduled time, to keep the crowd in our parking lot to a minimum. You should utilize every other parking stall to assist with maintaining social distancing.
5. When you arrive at church, exit your car and proceed to the main entrance behind the bell. This is the only entrance you will be allowed to enter. An usher, wearing a mask, will greet you and direct you where to stand as you wait your turn to enter the church. We are not requiring you to wear a mask, but encourage you to do so to help keep others – including our staff and volunteers – safe. The doors of the church will be propped open so no one needs to touch them.
6. As the group ahead of you moves forward, you will be directed into the gathering area where there will be places marked on the floor where you should stand, practicing social distancing unless you are with others who live in the same household. A video will remind you how you can help us to keep everyone safe, lead you through a brief examination of conscience, and the prayers that are a part of the Penitential Rite of the Mass.
7. The usher will then direct you into the church. There will be places marked on the floor indicating where you will stand to keep everyone more than six feet apart. As you find your place to stand, there will be hand sanitizer for you to cleanse your hands. I will be present to offer you the Body of Christ. I will sanitize my hands as each group arrives and departs. I will be wearing a mask. The sacred vessel containing the Body of Christ will remain covered until the time when Holy Communion is distributed.
8. I will lead you through a brief prayer service, similar to when Communion is distributed to the homebound, people in a nursing home, or individuals at the hospital.
9. When it is time to receive Communion, communicants will step forward one at a time. If you are receiving Communion in the hand, place your right hand on top of your left hand (we tell those making their First Communion in second grade to make a throne for Jesus). Extend your hands straight out away from your body with your right hand wide open and

flat. Take one step to the side, if you are wearing a mask, slide the mask down, and immediately consume the host. If I believe I have come in contact with your hand, I will need to sanitize my hand before giving Communion to the next person. Once you have consumed the Body of Christ, begin walking toward the exit (the west door).

10. If you prefer to receive Communion on the tongue, open your mouth wide and tilt your head back slightly. After each person receives Communion on the tongue, I will cover the Eucharist and need to go to wash my hands using the sink in the choir area.
11. Either before or after receiving Communion you will not be able to sit or kneel in a pew or pray in the chapel. Do not anticipate using the bathrooms. It is not appropriate to wear gloves when receiving the Eucharist.
12. You will not be able to take the Eucharist home with you unless you are a commissioned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. You must have your own pyx. We do not have any we can make available to you at this time. You can only take Communion home for family members residing in the same household as yourself. If you are doing this, put the pyx in your outstretched hand and the Body of Christ will be placed in the pyx before you receive your host.
13. Once you exit the church, move immediately to your car. Once you are in your car but before you leave the parking lot, since the word Eucharist means thanksgiving, if you are by yourself, prayerfully tell God three things for which you are thankful. If you are with other family members, encourage each person to mention one or two things for which you are thankful.
14. For those who arrive at church and have not signed up for an appointment, it will be necessary to wait until there is a time when less than eight people are scheduled to enter the church or until ten minutes before the hour when within the schedule open spots will be allotted to accommodate extra people.
15. Initially times will be available from 8 AM until noon. Additional times will be added as these times fill up.
16. If you are in need of a low gluten host, indicated this as you step forward to receive Communion.
17. As you arrive, a box will be available for you to leave your offering. We are also collecting food for the food pantry, masks for businesses and organizations in our area, diapers for

Operation Help, and cards/ letters for area care facilities. We are also collecting hand sanitizer if you have any you can spare.

I appreciate that there are a lot of very specific details on how Communion will be distributed. These are intended to keep everyone safe and limit the possibility of the coronavirus being spread. In offering a time of reflection as you arrive and depart, I hope we are enhancing the sacredness of this process. As you move through the church entering and leaving, please be attentive to maintaining a spirit of reverence and limit conversation.

In closing, one last time: **no one should feel obligated to come to church to receive Communion. This is an opportunity to meet a spiritual hunger, but is not a replacement for Mass.** Anyone participating should view Mass preferably prior to receiving Communion or immediately after. Finally it is paramount that we follow these guidelines specifically so this opportunity can continue.

Wishing you God's blessings, Easter joy and hope, and for us all a quick end to this pandemic,

Father John