

## **Dear Parishioners,**

As you may know Bishop Thomas wants Holy Communion brought only by priests during this time. When he made this announcement I was a little frustrated. My first thought was, "Wow! I'm going to have to visit a lot of people." While I have made many visits to parishioners who are not quite ready to return to Mass ... I must admit that this has been a joyful blessing in disguise! How often does a priest have the opportunity to enter another's home in his first month and enjoy his parishioner's company in their own home? I have visited many people to bring them communion because they are not quite ready to return to the celebration of public Mass. I look forward to similar visits throughout my time here in Bethlehem and Crestline as many people I visit can't attend Mass even if we were not in the midst of a pandemic.

Yet...There is another group I have been visiting who have expressed a great desire to return to Mass. But because of the pandemic and through proper discernment in their situation, they have taken advantage of the Bishop's dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. This is understandable and I know that many are not ready to return to public Mass. Though for those who are not high risk and who are yearning for the Word and Sacrament our Lord gives us, I do believe we can offer a Mass in our spacious Convocation Center where extra precautions can be taken to greatly decrease the risk of exposure. **With this in mind beginning next Sunday on August 16<sup>th</sup> at 10:30am we will have our first "Mass with Increased Prudence" in our wonderful Convocation Center.** At this Mass there will be extra precautions put into place to help those who wish to be extra cautious from the Corona Virus. The spacing between people and different households will exceed the 6 feet rules of social distancing. The chairs will be set up in such a way that social distancing will be enhanced. Another addition will be that each usher will help those in need reach their seats safely before Mass through the main entrance and at the conclusion of Mass help those same people to the 3 exits of the Convocation Center.

It pains me not offering a second Sunday Mass in St. Joseph's Church and it also pains me that after prayerful reflection I believe that this "Mass with Increased Prudence" should omit singing. Yes our choir is amazing and they sing beautiful hymns... yet I feel it is a sacrifice we are called to make as a parish for those who wish to be extra cautious and still attend Mass. Unfortunately singing can produce the types of droplets that are more easily spread from person to person. If this is truly to be a "Mass with Increased Prudence" I think it is best at this point to avoid singing at this 10:30am Mass in the Convocation Center. Yes, singing is a staple in the Catholic Mass, but it is permissible to omit singing for a just cause.

So to outline the precautions that this Mass will offer please note the following:

1. Increased Social Distancing surpassing the recommended 6 feet.
2. No singing
3. Face Masks are required (While children and those with underlying medical conditions are exempt)
4. Masked Ushers to help guide anyone in need of assistance to and from their seats.
5. A shortened homily to ensure a holy yet expedient Mass.
6. Doors locked once capacity has been reached. (Though I don't see this happening due to the large capacity of the Convocation Center.)

Though this Mass will be different from all of our other Masses offered, please do not let this "Mass with Increased Prudence" strip you of the love Jesus offers us in the Mass. Rather may it be a cause for rejoicing if more parishioners celebrate with us due to the increased precautions. I promise our God will be fully present at this Mass in His Word and Sacrament.

***In Christ,  
Fr. Jeff***