

6 May AD 2020

Dear Friends,

Happy Easter! It is with great joy that I share with you the news that we have a date for public Masses to resume - the weekend of 23-24 May; and as of now weekday Masses would resume beginning that Monday, 25 May. Bishop Rhoades has made this important and difficult decision for a number of reasons; I personally trust him and am so grateful for both his generosity and concern for our wellbeing. All priests were given several pages of directives and we have ample time to prepare. Of course this is a matter of managing risk responsibly and not eliminating risk entirely.

The purpose of this letter is to share with you some initial information (more will be shared closer to 23 May) which will help us do what we can to prepare for Mass to resume.

- 1) The **dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days** is extended until at least 15 August, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- 2) One directive from both civil officials and Bishop Rhoades is that **those who are most at risk of death** continue to stay home. However, and I want to be very clear about this, anyone may choose to return to Mass. ‘Shaming’ an elderly parishioner who chooses to return to Mass would be unacceptable. That said, one might consider even more aggressive social distancing when near an elderly parishioner, and yet while striving to be exceedingly friendly and warm.
- 3) For **those who do choose to stay home** and continue to participate in Mass virtually, we will do our best to put together a plan to make available the reception of Holy Communion, and as reverently and safely as possible.
- 4) We will **livestream** every Sunday Mass on our parish’s Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/saintjoemish](http://www.facebook.com/saintjoemish)). You need not have a Facebook account to access the livestream, as our page is public. Of course there are plenty of other virtual options for Mass, as well.
- 5) **Masses will follow the usual schedule.** The church will accommodate about  $\frac{1}{3}$  its capacity. Every other pew will be roped off. Members of the same household will sit together and close to each other (like normal). Different households would occupy either a different pew or, if the same pew has room, accounting for 6 feet of distance between. Seating in church will be first-come, first-served.

- 6) For all but the 7:15am Mass (where numbers should not be an issue), **the school gym will be available and set up for overflow**. Further, the setup in the gym will account for *more aggressive* social distancing (some may prefer the gym for this reason). Given that I do not know what to expect by way of numbers, we will set up a screen and project the livestream of Mass in there for the first weekend. We may end up offering a separate Mass in the gym at the same time as the one in church.
- 7) The directives from Bishop Rhoades (in addition to our county-wide directive) indicate that all (except little children, those with trouble breathing, the priest, readers while reading, and servers, and of course all while receiving Communion) should be wearing a **facemask**. I realize this can be a sensitive issue. It is my responsibility to clearly communicate this expectation. Further, I genuinely think it is in our best interest to see full compliance with this, and I would suggest this as one further opportunity to offer up some small suffering in union with Christ on the Cross, which is what the Mass makes present. We are also working to have free masks available (which you would then be able to keep).
- 8) I invite anyone willing to become an **Usher** to do so. Of course anyone who may choose to step down as an usher during this time should feel entirely free to do so. We will need to assemble all the ushers for some orientation prior to May 23 and work out some details so as to best assist those who come to Mass. Please call (255.6134) or email ([parish@stjoemish.com](mailto:parish@stjoemish.com)) if you'd like to step up! We need you!
- 9) As we await the resumption of public Masses, all of our regularly scheduled times for **Confession** are able to resume immediately. Making a good Confession during this time leading up to May 23 is a particularly fruitful thing we can do to be as prepared as possible to receive Holy Communion again. Of course, if we are ever conscious of any serious sin, we *need* to go to Confession prior to Holy Communion, lest the reception of Holy Communion itself be another serious sin. Times: M-Sat 7:30am, T 5:30pm, W 5pm, Sat 9:30am. A video is posted on the Facebook page (and linked up on the website) if you'd like to see how this works!
- 10) **Adoration/Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament** may also resume immediately. M-Sat 7:30-8:30am and T 5:30-6:30pm .
- 11) The **Office** will remain closed and we will continue to work remotely for the time being.
- 12) Meetings of parish groups may resume in groups of 25 or less, with appropriate social distancing. Please coordinate with Carol in the office about this.

St. Joseph, pray for us!

Father Chris