

## ***Return to Mass!***

May 7, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

After meeting with the College of Consultors (the priests who advise the Bishop on several important matters), Bishop Robert Guglielmone has given approval for churches in the Diocese of Charleston to resume the sacraments with public daily Masses starting on May 11. Our churches will start public weekday Masses again at St. Boniface on Wednesday, May 13, at 5 pm; at Holy Spirit on Thursday, May 14 at 5:30 p.m.; and at St. Mark on Friday, May 15, at 6 p.m. The first public Vigil/Sunday Masses since cancellations in March due to the coronavirus can be held the weekend of May 16 and 17.

But the Bishop and health officials point out that the risk of contracting COVID-19 still exists. So, a number of health safety restrictions and practices are being put in place to help minimize that risk. Many involve social distancing or not interacting closely with others outside your family who might spread the virus to you or who might receive it from you.

Masses are to resume on a reduced scale, with attendance limited to only one-fourth (25%) of a church's seating capacity. Some seats will be blocked off to help separate people, only families are to sit closely together, and a distance of six feet should be maintained between other individuals at all times – entering church, sitting, during Communion, and leaving church. That means the ushers may direct where we must sit and how we enter or leave church. Some Masses are too crowded to meet the restrictions, so those will be held outdoors. That is planned for the Saturday, May 16, Mass at Holy Spirit (it will start earlier at 6 p.m.), the Sunday, May 17, 10:30 a.m. Mass at St. Boniface, and the Sunday, May 17, 2 p.m. Mass at St. Mark.


Holy Communion will be distributed in the hands only and there will be no drinking of the Precious Blood from the cup. Communion to the homebound remains suspended due to the health risks posed to some of our most vulnerable parishioners. However, spouses and immediate family members may use a pyx to take Communion to those staying in their home. Since people receiving Communion inside church walk near other members of the congregation when returning to their seats, Communion may be distributed at the end of Mass as people leave the church.

The use of hymn books, missalettes and other liturgical aids that are typically handled by multiple people will be limited. Some books will be available for families to use and take home, but they must be brought back each week for that family to reuse. If or when we run out of books, we can make copies of some prayers or songs, but all copies must be discarded after each Mass. Parishioners, priests, deacons and liturgical ministers are expected to bring face masks to wear in church. Social gatherings are not allowed before or after Mass. No Rosaries or personal Confession before or after Mass. The Bishop has granted general absolution through the month of May to those in attendance only. Adoration is permitted during the week, but only if social distancing requirements can be met.

Perhaps most importantly: The Diocese asks worshipers who are sick, vulnerable or at risk **not** to attend Mass at this time but to watch it online or on TV. I will continue to livestream Sunday Masses on the St. Mark Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/StMarkNewberry/>) at 12:30 p.m. (English) and at 2 p.m. (Spanish). Recorded versions of those Masses will also be on the Facebook page for later viewing at any time. The Bishop is still granting dispensation to those who are uncomfortable attending weekend Masses in person and those who are at high risk.

The restrictions may be inconvenient, but the Bishop says they are also reasonable and prudent measures to help ensure everyone's safety. Thanks for your understanding and cooperation. And we're looking forward to seeing everyone again soon!

May God bless you and your families,

  
Rev. Orlando Serrano  
Parish Administrator