

April 16, 2020

Dear Parishioners of St. Michael, St. Joseph, and Most Sacred Heart,

Jesus Christ is Risen; Alleluia, Alleluia!!

Four versions of this Easter letter have been composed, and I haven't liked any of them, so here goes #5! The simple truth is: ***I love you all and I miss you all!*** With all my heart and soul, I wish to each and every one of you a **"Happy Easter!"** No doubt, most of you are heart-broken not to have participated in an Easter Mass this year. My priesthood feels hollow in a way because I do not have you as a congregation in my daily life, the same way you are deprived of the Mass and Eucharistic Communion. I yearn for that fullness of worship and to share with you the Sacraments of the Church. It can't happen soon enough as far as I am concerned. Most of each day I spend praying for you, your health and well-being.

I'll be saying a few things about the ongoing effects and our responses to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, but I really want to reach out personally first.

Thank you to all who watched and responded positively to my attempt at social media videos for Holy Week. Talk about a "fish out of water!" I suppose everyone could see how nervous and ill-at-ease I was trying to get a message across about Palm Sunday, Holy Week, the Triduum, and Easter Sunday. If it did any good, that was fully by the grace of God. I needed to do it because, as your Pastor, I want all of you to keep the presence of God in your lives. And I know that this is a time that tries the ability of each of us to recognize God and His love.

It was a true joy to see so many drive through for the Blessing of Palms on Saturday, April 4th. There was some backlash from other areas that did not offer "drive through," but I remain grateful to the people who came up with the idea and had me get approval from Bishop Duca. As unusual as it was, it helped me make a connection to many of you! If I may be so bold as to say this, I think those who came through enjoyed it as much as Fr. Alec, Deacon Alfred, and I enjoyed offering the blessings.

I am ever so grateful to the parishioners who are volunteering to help open and disinfect St. Michael and Prompt Succor Chapel on Sunday mornings. It wasn't my intention to exclude St. Joseph or Sacred Heart churches, but to recognize that at least one location of either side of the cluster territory could serve the whole cluster, plus limit the cleaning efforts that need to be expended for this opportunity. I regret the restrictions in numbers, but this is to obey the State recommended limit for public gatherings. The sanitation efforts are also our way to curtail the potential spread of the virus.

Again, it was parishioners who came up with the idea and created the "drive through" Way of the Cross at St. Joseph on Good Friday. This was so well received and utilized, I know it was Jesus' inspiration that led to this effort. I am still moved to tears when I realize how much you let your faith show by what you do for each other. It just proves that God is working through you as much if not more than me, so please keep sharing your inspirations for the sake of your sisters and brothers. We are in this together, and together, we take care of each other!

So, we get to the crux of my Easter letter and thoughts: **A Resurrection Moment!** This whole pandemic and the need for self-quarantines and/or Stay-at-Home directives makes our lives feel unusual to say the least, and totally out of joint, physically, mentally, emotionally, and

spiritually. But Jesus rose from the dead that first Easter Sunday, and has proven himself to be Risen time and time again, year after year. This is what we celebrate, ideally in community worship, at Mass, receiving the Eucharist, His Body and Blood. But we can still celebrate the Risen Life of Jesus away from church, being deprived of Mass and the Eucharist, because God sends each of us “Resurrection Moments.” What do I mean? *This is a moment when the mind, body, and soul experience the presence of God, and we are overcome with joy, no matter what is happening to the world around us.*

Here’s an example: the other day, I was at the grocery store buying some essential food items, and, not wanting to get too close to people, I was simply smiling in the direction of the people around me. All of a sudden I realized: I’m wearing a mask and no one can see me smile! Duh!! I started laughing at myself and to myself, but I was overwhelmed by the fact that God’s love was in my heart, I was living my concern for others and from my heart, trying to show concern. But it didn’t matter whether anyone else realized that; God was at work within me proving I was in touch with the Risen Life of Christ. That’s a Resurrection Moment.

I’m inviting you to watch for Resurrection Moments in your lives. We don’t plan them, but God reveals Himself to us in so many simple and unexpected ways. They are private, but powerful, and they dispel the darkness around us. These moments wash away our doubt and gloom and help us to know the love of God for us, they inspire us to share the love of God with others. The Risen Life of Christ is to be found inside our own lives each and every day. Sure, there are still many hurdles to cross before life returns to some normality, but even now, Resurrection Moments surround us! Look for them, and if you like, share them with family and friends because they need to hear your moments. I’d enjoy hearing some of those moments, too, if you care to share with me.

As I said at the start, I love you all, and I miss you all. God bless you with the Joy of Easter and the Risen Life of Christ.

Fr. Vincent J. Dufresne

INFORMATION

Some new, some the same, so please read it all.

Pastoral Center Office Hours:

The Pastoral Center Office is now **closed** to all business because of the “Stay At Home” Directive. Office staff, deacons and priests, will regularly check e-mail and voice messages from home, and handle any necessary assistance to parishioners according to the protocols in place. We want to do our part to keep everyone safe by limiting as much as possible direct interaction.

Masses:

Fr. Alec and I continue to offer a private Mass each day in the Sacred Heart rectory chapel; this Mass covers all the intentions received for the day. We continue to invite your “spiritual” participation because you cannot be there physically. Monday through Friday, the Mass is at 11am; Saturday is at 5pm; and Sunday is at 10am.

Our cluster website offers links to TV and online Masses – we just don’t have the set up to stream our own local Masses. And there is also a link for offering the “Spiritual Communion” prayer. I know as well as anyone this is not the same as attending Mass, but in this moment, watching and making a spiritual Communion does impart the grace of God until full participation is once more available.

Churches Open for Visits:

As I mentioned above we are opening two churches to offer parishioners the opportunity to spend time in prayer with the Blessed Sacrament, an opportunity for spiritual comfort and reassurance until public Masses begin again:

St. Michael Church in Convent, Open Sundays only, 8:00am to 12 Noon.

St. Joseph Church in Paulina, Closed until further notice.

Sacred Heart Church in Gramercy, Closed until further notice.

Prompt Succor Chapel in Lutcher, Open Sundays only, 8:00am to 12 Noon.

The Perpetual Adoration Chapel shall remain closed until further notice as well.

Sacraments for the Sick:

We still request that as soon as possible please let the priests know if someone is positively diagnosed as having COVID-19, so that we can begin offering pastoral assistance to the person and family. Hospital visits will require we follow hospital protocols and the directions of medical personnel. In the case of a person quarantined at home, we do not anticipate breaking the quarantine.

Both of your priests are ready and willing to bring Holy Communion and to offer the Anointing of the Sick to anyone "in danger of death." Family members should call the Pastoral Center and leave a message. After hours, please use the Voice Mail message system to leave a message for the Emergency Voice Mail system, which contacts the priest. Someone will be there as soon as humanly possible.

Funerals:

We are following contagion protocol, which means no more than 10 people in an enclosed area, so currently, all prayers are being offered in a Graveside service. When things return to normal, we will offer Memorial Masses for the deceased who could not have a Funeral Mass. At that time, all families will be contacted by the Pastoral Center.

Sacrament of Baptism:

Families who have completed all the necessary preparations for Baptism can contact the Pastoral Center to schedule a date and time for the Sacrament. The 10 person limit must be enforced, and this includes the infant and the minister.

Sacrament of Reconciliation:

Anyone needing the Sacrament of Reconciliation should call the Pastoral Center, leave a message with either Fr. Vincent or Fr. Alec, and we can schedule a personal time convenient for priest and penitent alike. We still cannot schedule a general time for the Sacrament.

First Holy Communion:

The celebration of First Holy Communion is postponed until further notice. The children and parents would still have the morning retreat to attend, the practices, as well as the Sunday Mass celebration. Obviously we will restart the process once the crisis has ended.

R.C.I.A.:

The Elect awaiting the Sacraments of Initiation, and the Candidates for Full Communion awaiting their Profession of Faith and the completion of their Initiation, like the children waiting for First Holy Communion have been asked to wait until the Church community comes back together as a whole to celebrate these Sacraments. We simply do not know when that will be at this time, but we will complete the Rites of Initiation as soon as possible.

Weddings:

The same 10 person limit exists for weddings. Any couples planning weddings in the near future are aware and are making the appropriate arrangements. Because we do not know when this restriction will be lifted, it is each couple's choice about how they want to proceed.

Parish Contributions:

I am truly grateful that so many parishioners, in spite of not having Sunday Masses, have continued to make financial contributions to your parishes. Online Giving has seen a remarkable increase. Many are choosing to mail in their contributions, and a sizeable number are dropping off their donations using the Pastoral Center drop box. Your willingness to continue this necessary support is another sign that we know these closures are temporary, and we all plan to return to normal as soon as we can.

Mass Intentions:

We are still able to accept Mass Intentions and stipends. Please write down the days, dates, and intentions you desire; you can place them in the Pastoral Center drop box or mail them to the Pastoral Center. Be sure to include a phone number at which you can be reached. Someone will be in touch with you to have your intentions scheduled and honored as soon as possible.

Your pastor's final thoughts: May God bless each of you in keeping with your own generosity! Which means that each of you should be wonderfully graced for the rest of your lives, because you are a daily grace in my life! The peace of the Risen Christ remain with you always. Amen.