

Companions on the Journey

August 23, 2020

Dear Friends,

This past weekend there were 278 total people in attendance at the three parish Masses. We are averaging around 90 people at each Mass each Sunday. During the weekdays we have between 20 and 25 people attending at 6:30 in the morning. At the 8:15 there are 35 or so in attendance. Together between 60 and 65 for daily Mass. We have not been using the Mary Chapel for daily Mass or Sunday Mass since the pandemic began. We do have three hours of Exposition of the Blessed sacrament on Monday mornings. In the Mary Chapel we can seat up to 90 people. But every other pew is taped off and when we have exposition there is usually one, two, or three persons present. Sometimes as many as five but always wearing masks and seated far from each other.

On Sundays and weekdays we use the big church for celebrations of the Eucharist. Our church seats around 800 people. Half of the pews have been cordoned off so as to preclude people sitting too close to others. It is my experience that those who are present are keeping six feet of distance away from the other persons. They are also wearing masks. I haven't seen people present not wearing a mask. I imagine that there may be an occasional person but I personally have not seen that. When you take 90 people and spread them out in a church that seats 800 it looks like there are about 60 people present. There is a real space around everyone. There is no crowding because there is no crowd of people.

I bring this to your attention because I have heard anecdotally that parishioners are not coming because they don't want to be in a "crowd" of people. I can assure you that if you choose to attend and participate in Eucharist and receive Holy Communion, you will not be entering into any crowd of people. Even at Communion time, there is an observable six feet of distance between communicants. People wear their masks until they are ready to receive. They either unhook their mask or drop it down to their chin, receive the host in their palm and then place the host in their mouth with their other hand. I am conscious of doing my best not to touch the hand of the recipient. We have been doing this now for over two months and have had no word about an outbreak of covid-19 because of anyone attending here.

I believe what we are doing here is a safe response to the corona-virus. We clean the pews between Masses. There is no kneeling, only sitting. There are no missalettes or bulletins or music issues in the pews. No holy water in the fonts. We try to keep as many doors inside open into the nave of the church. As much fresh air as possible. No real mixing with other parishioners before or after Mass although it saddens me to eliminate this aspect of communal life and worship. If you are looking for a rather safe place to visit that will help with your spiritual needs, then attending Sunday Mass is such an event. This remains so even though the Archbishop of Philadelphia has continued his dispensation from attending Sunday Mass.

On that note. While the dispensation to attend Sunday Mass has been put in place., the Archbishop has not ever said or indicated that there is no need to celebrate the Lord's day. That is no man-made rule. That commandment comes from the Lord above: Remember: Keep holy the Lord's day. In your homes, on the Lord's day, there is to be some prayer, some reflecting, some reading of God's word, some asking for help, some gathering of the members of the household. If you can gather for food sharing and meals, if you can gather to watch TV or play video games, you can gather for prayer and giving thanks to God for life and sustenance and his abundant grace. That responsibility has not been lifted. It would not be a good thing for us if it ever were lifted.

Pray at home or come gather with others to pray and be nourished but remember to give some of your Sunday time to Our Lord—in gratitude for the gifts of life. After all, it is his Day. And we fully expect to spend eternity with him in his kingdom.

**In the peace of Christ,
Msgr. McHenry**