

December 6, 2020

Dear Friends,

Advent is a time for us to become more reflective, to bring to mind the truly essential dimensions of our lives as human beings on this earth. This year though Advent may very well bring us closer to Christmas more quickly than usual. I have spoken with a number of people recently about their Thanksgiving gatherings. The most common expression was that of a low-key and smaller celebration than usual. It was similar in my own celebration of Thanksgiving.

It may well be the same with Christmas. How can we celebrate this great feast of Our Lord's birth in a way that will satisfy that yearning within us and yet keep us safe from the fallout of the coronavirus? Good question and one that is on the mind of many, many people. I find that the number of people coming to Church each Sunday has levelled off. I don't know if that is true everywhere but it seems to be the case here at Saint Anthony's for the past two months.

We get about 350 people total attending our three weekend Masses. One hundred to one hundred and twenty people at each Mass. Four sections of Church with every other pew roped off, this means that there is plenty of distance between people. It is a rare thing for me to see someone without a mask in Church. So, it seems to me that there is not going to be a sudden spike in attendance even for the great feast of Christmas. I believe people have grown cautious and are taking more seriously the constraints imposed because of covid-19.

To me, that translates into a series of Christmas Masses that will be less attended than usual—and by a large margin I believe. Those parishioners who are comfortable returning to the physical practice of the faith have already done so. I do not anticipate a large number of parishioners changing their assessments about crowds even to come to Christmas Mass. If you have decided to participate in Mass virtually then I ask you to give more attention to the actual “In-home” celebration that will be unique. If you are going to sing Christmas Carols in your home along with those attending the Mass that is being live-streamed then download some lists of the words of Christmas carols and have them available to your family beforehand.

You can download a Blessing for the Christmas Tree or for the Family Crèche and at the end of Mass on Christmas you can pray together that blessing for your family tree or manger scene. Let the kids take turns doing some of the reading of the blessing. Perhaps as you sit down for dinner you can ask each person to mention one present they would ask for from the Child Jesus—not for themselves personally but—for their family or for our church, or our country or our world. Asking the Lord for such a special present—and joining your requests with those of many all over the world—can only benefit a great many people. And the Lord both loves to give and is never outdone in giving. So ask with gusto—and conviction. Please put the time in ahead of time to facilitate the “In-Home worship experience of Mass at Home on Christmas that will be a blessing on your family.

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry