St. Robert and Good Shepherd

Guidelines for the celebration of Mass

Starting May 22-23, 2021, Pentecost Sunday.

 **The dispensation from the obligation to participate in every Sunday and Holy Day Mass will expire in our diocese on Pentecost (the weekend of May 22-23, 2021).** This means that starting in a few weeks, most of us should be at Mass.

 **We believe now is the right time to update our guidelines for Masses at St. Robert and Good Shepherd. This update is connected to our bishop’s recommendations for parishes in our diocese.** *A part of this return is connected both to a greater understanding of the risks at Mass (or lack thereof) and greater immunity among the general population to the coronavirus, thus allowing for less restriction.*

Our New Guidelines are as follows:

* Keep wearing a mask (We will probably ask everyone to keep wearing a mask until we get to 70% vaccines in the state among those 16 and older, or it’s clear all those that want a vaccine have had the opportunity to get one, whichever happens first. Probably sometime this summer.)
* Sing at Mass, if you desire. You are welcome to join in singing the Mass and the hymns. We will also be returning the hymnals to our pews.
* All pews will be available for seating. Sit where you want.
* Processions with servers before and after Mass will take place.
* We will invite parishioners to bring up the gifts.
* We will continue to distribute Holy Communion on one side and then switch to the other side as we have been doing this past year. (*We will return to inviting both sides to come up at the same time when we stop asking everyone to wear a mask at Mass.)*
* The Holy Water in the entrance receptacles will be refreshed/changed twice a week. (At SRB we have been refreshing 3x a week since Easter.)
* Enter and exit at all doors.
* We will return to normal cleaning of the church.

For the time being:

* No sign of peace.
* No distribution of the Eucharist under both Species (no offering of the Precious Blood).
* W*e will wait until our bishop indicates he would like us to return to offering these options at Mass. He has not given a specific date on when this will happen.*

Looking forward:

* Coffee and Donuts starting back up in the fall.
* Funeral Luncheons: coming back soon. No specific date yet, but probably also in the fall.

**Some of the Rationale Helping Form our New Guidelines for Masses**

*Starting May 22-23, 2021 Pentecost Sunday*

 **Spreading events are not Mass.** It is other activities that the population is choosing to do. From the beginning our bishop has been clear that the goal of the changes at Masses (and for a time suspending public Masses) was not to stop the pandemic (this wasn’t possible anymore, despite what some have been saying), but to help us more clearly understand what we are dealing with, for Masses not to become super spreader events, and to help hospitals not be overwhelmed. At this point, it is clear that our approach to Mass has accomplished these goals.

 From what I have experienced, people have been very good at staying away from Mass if they are sick. This factor undoubtably has contributed to why Masses are not spreading events. I don’t imagine this will change at this point. This means returning to singing and opening up all our pews is not greatly (or perhaps even slightly) increasing the risk of spreading the coronavirus.

 **When it comes to returning to singing at our Masses:** Other parishes have been singing either for several months or several weeks. No spreading incidences are occurring. At our parishes, we took a more cautious approach. We are benefiting from actual reality, helping us see that singing now is a good way forward.

 **When looking at social distancing:** Some parishes have been at over 50% and not fully socially distanced (6 feet) for months without problems.

 All our decisions thus far have kept everyone safe. Since last spring, we have been doing things differently than the general state guidelines. We have been allowed to do this because of religious exemption, thanks be to God. Lived reality is showing us that throughout everything that has taken place in our state and country, Mass is not a high risk event. Other activities are, but not Mass.

 Our bishop has asked us to return to singing and not restricting capacity. I agree with this request. As more and more of us either are vaccinated or have chosen not to receive a vaccine, it means every day more and more of us should be at Mass *and* there is no need for any restrictions at Mass.

 **Who is not obligated to be at Mass starting at Pentecost (May 22-23)?**

 You are not obliged to be at Sunday and Holy Day Masses if you are sick or caring for someone who is sick. (FYI: the next Holy Day of Obligation isn’t until November 1.) This is especially true if you have symptoms of a contagious sickness, like Covid or the flu. Then you *shouldn’t* come to Mass for the sake of others.

 In connection to the coronavirus, if you are in a high risk category (talk to your doctor to determine this) and waiting for a vaccine, you are not obligated to come. If you are caring for someone who is high risk and are still waiting for the vaccine, you are not obligated to come.

 May reason and faith guide our decisions and not fear, or even trying to eliminate one bodily danger from our lives at the cost of other necessary, more important goods for our happiness, like the Mass. Whatever tomorrow brings, God will be with us. May we let our Good Shepherd lead us.

––Fr. Jon