

Dear sisters and brothers,

As Ecclesiastes teaches us, there is a time for everything. The coming months will be a time of hellos and good-byes for us.

First, a hello. Join me in welcoming Joshua Fons to our parishes!

This weekend, one of our seminarians, Joshua Fons, joins us for May and June. He just finished his first year as a theologian, which means he is two years from being ordained a deacon and three as a priest. I will let Josh tell you a bit more about himself directly, but he spent time in the minor seminary after high school, then took a few years off, including spending four years as a FOCUS missionary (you can learn more about FOCUS here: <https://focusequip.org>). Then he returned to the major seminary last year. **Welcome to our parishes, Josh!** We are glad you are here and hope your short time with us will help you in your discernment and preparation for the priesthood.

Second, a sad goodbye to Fr. Anthony:

As you may be aware, Bishop Boyea asked Fr. Anthony to become the parish administrator at St. Isidore and Holy Family in Laingsburg and Ovid. Fr. Anthony said yes. **This means Fr. Anthony's time with us is drawing to a close. His last weekend here will be June 27.** We (I, at least!) am sad to see him go but happy for the people of Laingsburg and Ovid and for Fr. Anthony, as he will be stepping into the role of leading this parish. They have been officially merged, but there are still two churches and Masses at both, so Fr. Anthony will continue to get to travel back and forth. It's a good thing he likes cars!

It's a canonical thing, but if you are wondering, Bishop Boyea appoints new pastors as parish administrators for their first year and then makes them officially the pastor the next year. Fr. Anthony will be the only priest at his new parish and he will be in charge. I am happy for Fr. Anthony and the people there as I know he prefers a smaller, country parish. We know what a good priest he is and how well he will do. As an added bonus, this parish has three garages, so there will be plenty of space for him to keep building cars. If you're lucky, perhaps he'll build one for you.

Fr. Anthony is ready to be a pastor. While we will miss his bubbly, chipper, extroverted presence and squishy homilies (that's a joke, folks!), this is a good thing for him and for Jesus' Church. So we can give thanks for his time here and the blessing he is. Seriously, he has brought the gift of sound, clear teaching, a readiness to bring God's people the sacraments, to lead His Church in faithful worship, above all at the Mass, and his down to earth, clear thinking, no-nonsense approach. And he's given us the Car Show!

We will be offering a goodbye and thank you to Fr. Anthony at Good Shepherd on Sunday, June 20 and at St. Robert on Sunday, June 27.

Third, a joyful hello to Fr. Prabhu:

Fr. Prabhu Lakra is coming in July. He will be our new parochial vicar. I am deeply grateful for his coming and that we will be blessed to have two priests here. Fr. Prabhu (Prah-boo) is from the same diocese in India as Fr. Louis. He was ordained a priest in 2002 and has been in our diocese since 2006. Some of you may remember him as he stayed at St. Robert briefly with Fr. Louis and Fr. Roy just after he arrived here. He has been serving at St. Gerard (both now and earlier), and he also was at St. Joseph in Howell and St. Francis in Ann Arbor. I

learned recently that he is a good cook, so I am looking forward to enjoying Indian food with him!

Please keep Fr. Prabhu in your prayers, and in a special way his family as he has several family members in India who are sick with COVID.

Finally, Hello, Mass! The dispensation from the obligation to participate in Sunday and Holy Day Mass will expire on Pentecost 2021 (May 22-23, 2021).

Our bishop is calling us back to Mass. He believes that the good of Mass now is greater than any danger there might be because of COVID for most of us. This means the ability to not have to limit the number of people present at Mass. At our parishes this has not been a problem (as it has at some parishes), so I think this change will not really effect us too much as we navigate the end of the pandemic.

A brief word about the Sunday and Holy Day Mass obligation might be helpful to many of us. The Sunday obligation means that unless one has a legitimate/serious reason to not be at Mass, if you are Catholic, you must go to Mass. Normally, to choose to not come to Mass as a Catholic, is a grave evil, so one is in danger of having committed moral sin.

At the same time, this obligation is *not* asking the impossible of any of us. So, for example, if the priest doesn't show up, then those who tried to go to Mass haven't sinned.

Sickness and health are **always** a legitimate reason for the obligation to not apply. Anytime someone is not well, or caring for someone who is not well, or dealing with injury, or old age, which makes it dangerous or impossible to come to Mass, then they do not sin by not coming to Mass. If someone has symptoms of a contagious sickness, like covid or the flu, then that person should NOT come to Mass. If someone *knew* they were sick with a contagious disease then they would sin by coming to Mass.

So for coronavirus, anyone who is high risk and still waiting for a vaccine will not be obligated to come to Mass. If you have chosen not to get the vaccine, then you are obliged to come to Mass. Anyone who is caring for someone high risk and is still waiting for the vaccine is not obliged to come to Mass. Obviously, anyone who has symptoms or knows they have COVID should not come to Mass.

In the coming weeks, I will continue to reflect on aspects of our Sunday obligation, the great gift of the Mass and how we can invite each other back.

I want to conclude by inviting you to join me throughout the month of May for live updates and Q&A on our Facebook page(s). Every day at 2 PM, I, or someone else for those few days I am unavailable, will go live on our St. Robert Facebook page. When possible, I will go live on both our Good Shepherd and St. Robert pages, but sometime my devices make this impossible. I am hoping this will allow us to connect, be informed, be encouraged in our faith, get involved and invite.

May God bless you and yours abundantly this week.

—Fr. Jon