



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Catholic Church & School

Dear Parishioners:

On several occasions earlier this year, I intentionally prepared separate bulletin articles for St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John the Baptist because there were topics to be addressed which pertained mostly to SJB (Road America, the Meitler Study, the School, etc.) and I didn't want to risk "boring" STA. Besides, in those days, we were giving copies of SJB's bulletins to STA and STA's bulletins to SJB; so, if anyone really wanted to know what was going on in the parish not-one's-own, you could pick up the other parish's bulletin and read about it.

For the next few weeks, I am going to focus on matters that, on the surface, might appear to pertain mostly to SJB but, in reality, are – or should be – of deep concern to STA, as well. So, I will be preparing one article for both parishes.

Over the past month or two I've come across articles in national publications (e.g., the magazines *America* and *Commonweal* and the newspaper *National Catholic Reporter*) asking the question: will Catholics return to Church once the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided? For some, the question is whether people will return to pre-pandemic patterns of Mass attendance. For others, it's a more fundamental issue concerning how far adrift from the Church and its rites and rituals Catholics will find themselves once the danger has passed. Still others are asking if our Catholic Faith itself will have suffered irreparable harm because of our time away.

Locally, we continue to follow The Catholic Comeback Matrix, under which we remain in Phase One. Shifting into Phase Two (which could come as early as the beginning of August) will mean a slight expansion of activities; but the fullness of The Catholic Comeback will not be experienced until we enter into Phase Three, under which all restrictions will be lifted. I doubt this will happen before the end of the year or early next year – probably in tandem with the discovery and distribution of an effective vaccine. Until then, social distancing will remain the norm (which means our attendance capacity at SJB and STA will remain where they currently stand), wearing of facial masks will be encouraged, and the elderly and people with certain pre-existing conditions will continue to be advised to give serious consideration to avoiding public gatherings like the Mass.

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Late last month Archbishop ListECKi wrote to priests, deacons, parish directors, and parish and school leaders:)

We are grateful to God for our ability to return safely to Mass, yet we are mindful of the impact these past few months have had on the Body of Christ here in south-eastern Wisconsin. We need to help our people return to Sunday Mass and to live Sunday well for the sake of their spiritual and social well-being. We want to invite and encourage all to return home to Him.

These past months, we as a Church have longed for the celebration of the Eucharist, which is at the center of Catholic life. We have been deprived of celebrating with our neighbors at the table of Thanksgiving, and we have suffered the economic impact of unstable finances, lost jobs and furloughs from work, hurting out most vulnerable – the poor, the immigrant, the isolated and the elderly. Whatever the circumstances, we must help our people make Sunday worship the priority in their lives.

While we cannot expect people to return to a pre-COVID-19 life, we need to help our people understand that all right relationships derive first from God, whether it is in work, family or social activities. It is God who is our strength. God is the remedy to the ills that plague our nation. We know the heart of Sunday is worship when we direct our attention to God and experience his Son in the Real presence.

In 2014, the Archdiocesan Synod emphasized Sunday Mass as the priority for our archdiocese. I propose we offer a response to the pandemic with a special Sunday Initiative beginning with the start of the New Year and lasting through the entirety of 2021.

At our Synod event on December 5, 2020, we will look back and celebrate the Synod and we will look forward as we share with you details about the Sunday Initiative for parish use in 2021, including a short pastoral exhortation. We stand in witness as followers of Jesus Christ. Fulfilling Jesus' command to Love One Another starts first with loving God. That love is fully expressed through our worship on Sunday.

So, it looks like the Archbishop is setting a pretty clear agenda for the post-COVID-19 Church of Milwaukee. According to The Catholic Comeback Matrix, this will likely include the resumption of the Love One Another Capital Campaign, the pilot wave of which had been suspended by the shutdown back in March. This being the case, I would like to devote the next couple of weeks to exploring what I see as some of the particular challenges and opportunities that we as SJB and STA will be facing as we emerge from the pandemic.



Fr. Philip D. Reifenberg, Pastor