

Some Thoughts on Resuming Public Celebrations of the Mass

Fr. John Tapp (April 30, 2020)

On April 29th, Governor Ron DeSantis spoke to the citizens of Florida about “re-opening” our state in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Such statements bring hope, especially since we have been restricting our activities these last five weeks.

In light of such statements, many are wondering when we can begin attending public celebrations of the Mass. While the answer to that inquiry is still uncertain, I would like to share with you some information I recently came across on this topic.

1. While we all look forward to participating in the public celebration of Mass again, we do not have a definitive date for doing so. And, when that happens, that process will probably begin in stages – restricting the number of participants at each Mass.
2. One might assume that as we receive more specific instructions about this process from Bishop Parkes in the days and weeks to come, the most vulnerable will be instructed to refrain from participating at public Mass and the dispensation from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass will remain in effect for some time.
3. More than likely, we will continue to practice “social distancing” at Mass. Furthermore, those who come to church will probably be encouraged to wear masks and bring hand sanitizer or disinfectant wipes with them. Such practices will help keep fellow parishioners healthy as well as prepare the space for those who will attend Mass after us.
4. When we return to a public celebration of the Mass, we will continue with the practice of encouraging individuals to receive Holy Communion in the hand. And we will probably continue to suspend the distribution of the Precious Blood from the chalice for some time.
5. We need to be mindful that anyone who attends public Mass will still be at risk. Even with the best health practices and strict social distancing, anyone who enters a public space should be aware of the risk.
6. Finally, and certainly not least, there will be some bumps in the road as we re-open and reorient ourselves to a public celebration of the Mass. Patience will be key as we begin this process.*

In short order, I expect Bishop Parkes to issue instructions about this process of reopening our churches again for Sunday Mass. I know that his commentary and decisions will be based on the Covid-19 facts and figures that are made available to him. His recommendations will also be made in the best interest of the physical health and spiritual well-being of those in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. My comments above are simply a first attempt to acknowledge the reality of the slow and methodical process that will be involved as we re-open our churches for public Sunday celebrations in the weeks ahead.

On a personal level, I want you to know how deeply grateful I am to all of our parishioners for your generous financial and prayerful support of our parish during these challenging times. Your faithful witness has overwhelmed me and gladdened my spirit. I look forward to that day when we will worship together, in person, at the banquet of the Word and Eucharist. Until that day, let us continue to pray for each other and especially for those most affected by this Corona virus.

(*Bishop Wack, Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee)