



## DIOCESE OF ORLANDO BISHOP JOHN NOONAN

Note: A video version of Bishop Noonan's message may be found at <https://www.orlandodiocese.org/bishop-noonans-reopening-message/>

Holy People, the Peace of Christ be with you.

This has been a difficult time for all of us during the COVID19 pandemic. Many of you are anxious about the return to normalcy. I am not sure what 'normalcy' will be post pandemic. I have been speaking with the bishops of Florida and our priests and other lay leaders about how to return to Church safely, honoring the sacredness of each person in protecting our sisters and brothers in Christ. There will be changes when we come back to the celebration of Mass at our parishes. Some of these you may have already guessed. We will receive the Eucharist by the sacred host alone. We will reverently pray the Lord's Prayer without holding hands. There will be a reverent bow and or greeting during the Sign of Peace. Coffee and donuts and social time after Mass will be moved to your own homes, not on parish grounds.

These are just some of the ways in which we may encounter a different Church when we are able to open the doors of the sanctuary again. I promise to help you understand some of these changes and the reasons for them. God's light is manifested in humble love and it shines forth on those who are prepared to accept it. We are joined with each other through, with and in our triune God, no matter how far apart we must remain.

### Attendance at Mass



It has been truly difficult for us to not go to Mass during this time of the pandemic. Participation in Mass is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. As Catholics we have an obligation to attend Mass on Sundays. This obligation is not a burden but total gift. God's Holy Spirit, active in our lives, leads us to worship in spirit and in truth within the assembly of God's people.

When we return to public worship we will need to respect the restrictions and guidelines that the health professionals have provided. Choices will need to be made on the part of each individual. The obligation to attend Mass on Sunday is lifted until further notice. Christ suffers with those who cannot come to Mass during the pandemic. However, as Jesus taught us, suffering can lead to redemption.

You may have seen or heard news stories about "Drive-in Mass" or "Parking Lot Masses" from other dioceses throughout the country. In the Diocese of Orlando Mass will continue to be celebrated inside the sanctuary of the Church. The Church building is a special sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and an image of the Church dwelling in heaven. This space has been dedicated to God and blessed as sacred, worthy of the proclamation of the Gospel and our individual and communal offerings with God to God during the celebration of the Eucharist.

## Locked Doors of the Church



We will be called to make certain sacrifices when we return to the assembly of the Church. When you arrive to enter the Church, only the main doors of the Church will be open. Any side or back entrances will be locked. It may seem an inconvenience to you as you come to the Church from the parking lot; however, it is out of great care for you that we limit the number of entrances so as to prevent the spread of germs.

If you are handicapped or disabled in any way, park as close as possible to the main entrance or have someone drop you off at the main entrance.

## Empty Holy Water Stoups – But It Isn't the Triduum!



Holy Water stoups will be empty. Upon entering the Church we have been used to approaching the baptismal font or holy water stoup, dipping our fingers into the water and blessing ourselves as a remembrance of our Baptism. Health safety restrictions will not allow us to use the Sacramental of Holy Water in this way; however, it is most appropriate to continue the gesture of making the sign of the Cross when entering the

church remembering that we are God's adopted sons and daughters baptized in Christ Jesus in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

## Shorter Homilies



During the celebration of Mass after the proclamation of the Gospel, the celebrant offers a homily, the oldest form of preaching used by the Apostles and Fathers of the Church in addressing the faithful. The homily offered by the celebrant may be shorter than usual but its purpose, to share the meaning of the Sacred Scripture, will be given no matter the length. This will allow more time between the

celebration of Mass for dismissing the people and preparing to welcome those to the next Mass.

## Holy Exchange



The procession with the gifts is a powerful expression of the participation of all present in the Eucharist and in the social mission of the Church. It is an expression of the humble and contrite heart, the emptying of self that is necessary for making the true offering, which the Lord Jesus gave his people to make with him. During this period there will be no collection by way of passing a basket and no procession with the gifts. Parishes may consider placing large

baskets at the entrances of the Church with an attendant so that parishioners can place their offering in the basket upon arrival. Offerings may be made electronically or through the mail. Participate as your parish allows. While we may not participate in presenting the gifts at the Mass in the usual way, remember that we also make a spiritual offering of the gifts as well as our lives in a "holy exchange" with God—we pray: "accept the offerings You have given us, that we in turn may receive the gift of yourself."

## Spiritual Fasting



We must be mindful of those who will be absent during this time of limited capacity to gather, social distancing and high-risk health conditions. Our solidarity with those who cannot be physically present is essential during this time. Those who are unable to come to worship and experience the Sacrament offer their experience as a type of fast. “Such fasting, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI writes, could help people toward a deepening of their personal relation to the Lord in the Sacrament; it could be an act of solidarity with all those who have a yearning for the Sacrament but cannot receive it...Spiritual hunger, like bodily hunger can be a vehicle of love.” Indeed, the times when we are separated from Christ’s Sacraments can be opportunities for unnumbered graces.

## Sign of Peace



The exchange of Peace before the reception of Holy Communion acknowledges that Christ whom we receive in the Sacrament is already present in our neighbor. This gesture expresses the Gospel truth that communion with God in Christ is enjoyed in communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ—we are members, one with another, in the Body of Christ. When the deacon or priest invites us to offer each other a Sign of Peace it will be appropriate to offer a reverent bow and or verbal greeting “the Peace of Christ be with you.”

## Make of our hands a throne to hold the Bread of Heaven



During this time of pandemic it is most reasonable and prudent for the safety of all that Holy Communion be distributed to the congregation in the form of the Sacred Host – the bread that is consecrated and becomes the Body of Christ. The Church teaches that Christ, whole and entire, is received in each of the consecrated elements. We receive Christ the Lord himself, His Body and Blood, sacrificed on Calvary for the forgiveness of our sins and raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

When we receive the Sacred Host, we will receive on the hand. The Bishops have instructed us when receiving the Eucharist on the hand, the communicant approaches the minister with one hand resting on the palm of the other. After responding, “Amen,” the communicant steps to the side and reverently places the Eucharist in his or her mouth. Let us remember and take to heart the words of St Cyril of Jerusalem—they should make a throne of their hands, laying the right upon the left to form a throne for the King, forming at the same time a Cross.

### **Receiving Communion on the Hand, instead of the Tongue**

Out of care for the priest, deacon or the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who offer us Communion, it is important to know that Holy Communion on the tongue creates several health hazards during this time of pandemic, therefore it is recommended that communicants receive the Sacred Host on the hand. We do this out of a sense of care and concern for both ministers and communicants. If you have concerns about receiving on the hand, make arrangements with the presiding priest in advance of the celebration of Mass.

In some parishes, Communion may be offered after the celebration of Mass concludes so that clergy and Eucharistic Ministers of Holy Communion may wear masks to distribute the Sacred Host. The faithful who participate in the celebration of Mass are to follow cautionary protocols established by their parishes.

### Worship Aids: How to Actively Participate in the Celebration of Mass



As “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), we are led to full, conscious and active participation in the celebration of Mass. Worship aids to assist us to fully participate in the Mass are provided in many forms such as hymnals, printed song sheets with the Order of Mass, projection of the worship aid on video screens. Some of these aids will not be available because of restrictions and will need to be accessed electronically. As “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), we are led to full, conscious and active participation in the celebration of Mass. Worship aids to assist us to fully participate in the Mass are provided in many forms such as hymnals, printed song sheets with the Order of Mass, projection of the worship aid on video screens. Some of these aids will not be available because of restrictions and will need to be accessed electronically. Bishop Noonan will allow the use of I-Phones or this type of technology to be able to access on-line worship aids provided by your parish, when projection on video screens is not available.

### Sing to the Lord Joyfully



Music is important to the celebration of Mass, particularly on Sundays. A cantor and accompanist will lead you in song. Choirs and members of instrumental ensembles will not be immediately available. We are always blessed with the privilege to join our voices in song to the praise, honor and glory of God.

### Sacrament of Penance: Call to Conversion



As adopted sons and daughters of a loving and merciful God, we are always mindful of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross as the ultimate price paid for our sins. As human beings, we are well aware that we can falter and go astray. Yet God the Father of mercies never tires of calling us to Himself. In a sense we are continually being converted through repentance—by sharing in the sufferings of Christ; enduring our own difficulties; performing acts of mercy and charity, we become to the world a sign of conversion to God. This is why we have been given a great gift in the Sacrament of Penance.

Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance is different from what is known as “spiritual direction.” A spiritual director might be called a kind of coach who offers advice and counsel to an individual in a non-sacramental setting. The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance is not where this type of interaction is observed. However, it is a celebration of God’s mercy and forgiveness that sacramentally restores us to right relationship with God and one another in Christ Jesus. The Sacrament of Penance will be offered according to your parish capabilities. Individual sessions are to be kept to a maximum of five minutes to allow as many as possible to participate

in the Sacrament of Penance as well as to observe social distancing and health protocols. Confessionals are not to be used. Rooms or offices will be prepared to accommodate an appropriate distance between the confessor and the penitent.

### Stewards of the Earth



We are called to care for God's creation. While we are experiencing the pandemic, we have come to understand that caring for God's creation also means preservation of our natural resources. To praise God in this way, parishes will not be printing bulletins for distribution at Church and will offer them on-line at their parish websites so they are easily available to you.

### A Time to Gather



We are joyful to see those neighbors at Church whom we have not seen for some time. However, because of social distancing we ask that you wave from afar and leave the church property to share in fellowship. Likewise coffee or donut stations after Mass or resources to view will not be available.

### Other Parish Ministries



While we rejoice that our parish churches are re-opening for prayer, other parish ministries are still placed on hold. Social activities, ministry group meetings, wedding or funeral receptions, bingo, classes on the church campus or outreach ministries, such as thrift shops, etc. will not be offered or open until further notice.

For the Eucharist we long to receive, let us act as the Eucharist we are. Let us flourish the Eucharistic personality of the Church by living our identity with concrete acts of love in the world. Yes, this will require prayer-filled sacrifice. May our goodness be a grace before God.



Most Reverend John Noonan  
Bishop of the Diocese of Orlando