



St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church

May 29, 2020

So...WHEN can we come back to church?

In the past ten days there have been many updates and news releases from the State of Maryland, Howard County, and the Archdiocese regarding the status of restrictions and orders that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. For most of us, however, the bottom line is simple: Can we come back to church yet? Sadly, the answer--as of now--is no.

While Governor Hogan and Archbishop Lori are ready to allow public Masses to resume this weekend--with restrictions--for the Feast of Pentecost, Howard County Executive Dr. Calvin Ball has yet to lift the county's ban on "religious institutions...holding worship services and ceremonies indoors. The restriction on gatherings of more than 10 people remains in place—and those restrictions will continue to apply to religious gatherings."

When those restrictions are lifted, the guidelines of the Archdiocese of Baltimore will apply, which allow one third of church capacity, with social distancing and other restrictions to keep all safe. Having looked at our largest worship space, room 1 at Wilde Lake, those restrictions allow only 80 seats per Mass, out of 600. We are also looking at ways to have Mass offered safely outdoors.

In order to consider all our options, and to access the wisdom of each, I met with our Pastoral Council and Liturgy Team last Wednesday. It is the unanimous and heartfelt advice of our council and parish leaders and me, that for the time being we rely on the streaming of daily and Saturday and Sunday Masses, which has been received with so much approval and appreciation from our parish during this time of quarantine. A significant part of the consideration is that our streaming offers an enhanced Liturgy with music and full participation, as opposed to a stripped-down liturgy with congregation, but no singing and restricted movement.

Most importantly, and foremost in our discussion, is the need to be absolutely sure that when we gather for Mass, no one, young or old, is put at risk to their life. Even with the strong desire to receive the Eucharist in person, our gathering must give way to what amounts to an "absolute love of neighbor as oneself", otherwise we gather in violation of what Christ commands us. We realize that we have much more work to do to insure, to the best of our ability, and in obedience to safe practices and restrictions, that we can gather with a confidence of safety for all.

When this pandemic began, we sheltered in place, not only for ourselves, but to protect the most vulnerable among us. Currently, we are slowly but surely working toward reopening. Fr. Ferdinand is presently scheduling meetings to train those who have volunteered to help with guiding and monitoring our Masses, so all best practices are implemented and secured during our gatherings. At this time, Baptisms, Wedding, and Funerals may be celebrated with their appropriate restrictions, but we are not yet ready to gather in "Mass quantities".

We also strongly are aware that there are still hot spots of increasing infection, which tells us that we must be patient, and diligent, with an abundance of caution. I am grateful for your continued sacrifice, and for being the shelter of one another at this perilous time.

We will be sending more information to you, as the situation changes. If you are interested in volunteering to help guide our Masses when we reopen, please contact Fr. Ferdinand at fezenwachi@sjerc.org. As a reminder, we will be having a special Pentecost Service, this Sunday at 7pm, online at our streaming at www.sjerc.org. Please make plans to join us, so we can gather our parish together, while still being apart.

May God bless you with a selfless heart, and a resolute mind! Remember the promise of Pentecost which we celebrate: "Hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts. Through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

In the Peace of Christ,



Fr. Gerry Bowen