

March 26, 2020

My Dear Parishioners,

If you had asked me, a month or so ago, what I would be doing today, my answer would not have resembled the reality that we are currently dealing with. COVID19 has changed our lives and challenged our ability to adapt to numerous sudden changes in our daily lifestyle. Whenever I am faced with another difficult situation, I ask myself the question: “What advice would St. Francis de Sales give to me in this situation?” That really simplifies things for me, because his response would be: *Do whatever is most charitable*. Practicing charity is the best way to move the focus of the situation away from ourselves and onto our neighbor. I know that we are all being inconvenienced and as a result we have feelings of frustration and perhaps even anger, but when we turn our hearts to charity we are better able to extend our hearts out to others, which allows us to imitate what our generous God does for us at every moment of our life.

As a priest, my greatest joy is leading our parish in the celebration of the Eucharist. While I might be tempted to have negative feelings about the suspension of public Masses, when I consider that all of our cancellations are aimed at making sure that people have access to good medical care and also lessen the chances that people die, I can focus on my actions much more positively. Charity is at work and we are doing God’s work. Having listened to so many insights from Francis de Sales, I am sure that you see the good that is occurring during these trying times.

As long as Fr. Joe, Fr. Tom and I remain healthy, we will continue to celebrate the Eucharist on weekdays and Sundays and make the Mass available in digital format. Most parishioners tell me that the easiest way to find the Mass is to go to our website: www.ihmchurch.org and click on the *Mass Online* icon on the right side of the screen. Last Sunday, the Mass in English received almost 1,200 views and the Mass in Spanish received over 200 views. Considering that many people may view the Mass as a couple or as a family, I know that we are reaching many people. I know that many of you have expressed disappointment that you are not receiving communion. I invite you to participate in long-standing Catholic tradition of receiving *Spiritual Communion*. Fr. Lewis Fiorelli, OSFS, a theologian and Salesian writer, describes *Spiritual Communion*:

Receive Jesus into your hearts. Reverence him there. Speak with him, trust him, love him. Remain with him in silence and presence, your thoughts and

energies centered for a while on him alone. These may be brief moments, but they will spread the gentle strength of their grace throughout the difficult day ahead. The Lord is always near and always loving. Welcome him daily into your heart and into your lives through the practice of spiritual communion. It will make all the difference.

Know that Fr. Joe, Fr. Tom and I, along with Deacon Wally, Deacon Francis and Deacon John will be praying for you during these trying times. We invite you to pray for us as well. Since your three priests are technically in elevated risk groups and we live in the same house, we are trying to practice social distancing since all three of us will become quarantined should any one of us become infected.

This leads me to the subject of communication. We will continue to publish our parish Bulletin and post it on the website. We also have a list of closures on the front page of the website. We will do all that we can to keep that list updated in a constantly evolving situation. Enclosed with this letter are directions for using our *IHM Parish App*. The *App* contains the most updated information and also has the ability to send out “push notifications” to notify you if something suddenly changes. It is free and easy to install.

My second subject is finances. Without our usual Sunday Masses, the offertory has dropped significantly. We are committed to continuing the good work of our parish and the Church. Since many of our expenses are fixed, this has really put us in a financial pinch, and we need your help. Consider making the transition to online giving. The directions for doing so are enclosed with this letter. Many parishioners have moved to online giving and others have stopped by to drop off their envelopes. I am very grateful for their loyalty. We are also enclosing a self-addressed envelope for those who are not able to transition to online giving. Consider collecting some of those weekly envelopes that might be laying on your desk and sending them or simply a check. Know that I understand if you are unable to contribute because you are out of work or are experiencing a financial hardship. If you are able to help us pay our bills, you will be helping your fellow parishioners who provide their services both in-person or behind the scenes.

While I don't know how long this crisis will continue, I look forward to the day that I can welcome you back home. All of us at IHM are a family that cares for one another. I will be happy when we can gather again as a parish family in prayer.

In Christ,