



DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

Office of the Bishop

Joyfully Present: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace." (Romans 15:13)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

After prayerful and careful consideration of the guidelines and recommendations put forth by local government and health officials, I am pleased to announce that we will slowly begin the process of returning to public worship in the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

Effective Monday, May 11, 2020, gatherings for public celebrations of daily Masses (Monday through Saturday mornings) will again be permitted. My prayer is that whether you join us in person for Mass or stay at home for health reasons, we will all be joyfully united and present to the Lord in prayer, worship and service.

As you know, entering public spaces carries a greater risk during this pandemic. That is why those who are ill, elderly or have underlying health conditions are urged to stay home.

However, if you are able to attend daily Mass, you will notice many precautions in place to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 in our churches.

For example, we will insist on social distancing for those who are not from the same household, only allow 25% capacity inside our churches or social halls, encourage the use of face masks, refrain from passing around collection baskets, prohibit physical contact, such as exchanging the sign of peace and holding hands during the Our Father, and eliminate the use of hymnals. I have prepared guidelines and resources to help each of you know what to expect when you return to church.

If everyone does their part, we can be joyfully present, even as we adjust to these changes. For this moment in history, this is what we are called to do, as we honor each life given to us by God and show charity for the well-being of our neighbors.

Please keep in mind that some parishes in our diocese might not be ready to resume daily Masses on May 11 because of their unique circumstances. Let us seek to be understanding of the challenges that these communities might face. Patience and prayers are needed as we navigate this transition back to public worship. These are certainly extraordinary times and it is with extraordinary grace and love that we will move forward together, united in Christ.

Regarding Sunday Mass, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is still in effect and will be until further notice. I have not yet determined a date for resuming Sunday Masses with a congregation present, but I am hoping that by Pentecost, our community can once again unite for public worship. Until then, I invite you to continue to pray and view the Sunday Mass online or on TV if you are able.

May the love and mercy of Jesus Christ and the blessings of almighty God be with you today and always.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend Gregory Parkes
Bishop of St. Petersburg