



Annunciation Parish

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July, 19, 2020

The Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinal Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Annunciation Parish,

(Please note that this letter is also offered as the homily for the recorded Mass today, July 19th. Given the information contained in this letter, it is also being sent to all parishioners, via email. It is lengthy; I ask you to take the time necessary to read it. Thank you! Fr. Grogan)

These continue to be very difficult, uncertain, and confusing times. I find that in my efforts to guide the pastoral efforts of Annunciation Parish, all routines and certainties are upended. As a priest ordained to lead the public prayer of the Church, this is extremely difficult. As one who takes seriously as the focus of my every pastoral effort, the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy as called for in the renewal that comes from Vatican II, the suspension of public worship and the elimination of many practices expressive of that renewal is disorienting. And I have been asked to subordinate my individual identity to the safety and well-being of the people entrusted to my pastoral care. I have tried to do that.

As one young woman in the parish shared with me earlier this past week, a very real mourning for what has been lost needs to happen. In truth, we have been mourning, even though we may not have named it as such. Blessed are those who mourn, says Our Lord, for they shall be comforted.

Comfort. The word itself means strong together. The work it suggests is that of a community of believers. That is the vision of the Vatican II renewal: The Baptized People of God know themselves as such and this knowledge is grounded and nurtured in the faithful celebration of the liturgy, not as anyone's individual piety but as our common work of holiness.

The community of believers should always be our focus. We are stronger together; we are motivated out of concern for the safety and well-being of all. What we do when we return to public, common worship, we do as the Body of Christ, a wonderful and beautiful and comforting unity of believers, gathered by the Spirit received in Baptism and confirmed in Confirmation, offering ourselves as one to the glory of the Father.

As you know, with the irreplaceable assistance of our Parish COVID-19 Response Team, I have wrestled with the responsibility of determining the continued suspension of, and hopeful resumption of public celebration of the Mass in our Parish. This wrestling seeks to reconcile two goods: the safety and well-being of all (indeed, again recently, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati communicated that the stipulation for public worship was that such safety and well-being would have the highest priority in all that we do), and the community-building grace of the community's celebration of the Eucharist.

Indeed, we had initially intended to resume public Mass on Sunday, June 28th. Shortly before that date, all indicators for Ohio and Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati reported a surge in cases, an increase in hospitalizations, and new directives from State and City. We postponed the resumption of Mass.

In reviewing data this past week, the Response Team and I came to consensus that there are now favorable local trends in the rate of transmission, and given our protocol for safe worship at Annunciation – that does not eliminate all risks of exposure and transmission, but is as stringent as possible to reduce those risks - that a **proposed resumption of public Mass for Sunday, August 2nd**, is reasonable. That is our plan at this time.

Such a plan involves a continued monitoring of relevant indicators, a possibility of revision of the plan, and insistence that **all who attend any public gathering comply with all social-distancing and safety protocols set forth for our parish, as well as civil mandates and ordinances. Among other things, that absolutely means the wearing of a face mask that covers both mouth and nose while in Church, except for the actual reception of Holy Communion. You will be required to follow all direction offered by me and the ushers.**

We will do this. The face mask has become the new outward expression of our inward intention to put no one else at risk of exposure. That previous sentence is rich in meaning: outward expression of inward realities is the foundation of all of our Catholic Sacramental belief; Christian charity that does no injury to one's neighbor is the foundation of all Catholic morality. There is nothing about wearing a face mask that inherently contradicts our Catholic Christian identity; indeed, the best of who we are has laid the foundation for us to so behave in this time of crisis. We will do this.

The plan to resume public worship on August 2nd, allows for two weeks of further communication of information and guidelines, as well as "securing" ministers of the liturgy, including ushers, who are versed in the protocol of safe worship at Annunciation.

Please also note that **the dispensation from the obligation of the faithful to attend and participate in Mass on Sundays, first implemented in mid-March, continues until further notice.** Please recall my earlier communications encouraging us to make no distinction between those who choose to attend public Mass at this time and those who continue to exercise reasonable caution regarding public gatherings and do not attend Mass. Christian charity insists on making no such distinction. For those who choose not to attend Mass for whatever reason, we will continue to post a recording of the Sunday Mass online. Please go to our FACEBOOK/Website for links.

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In today's Gospel, Our Lord again uses an agricultural image of fields and seed-sowing and harvests. This is almost lost on us city-dwellers. It is even more alien to us as consumers who live in a world of fast-food immediacy. We are so accustomed to having everything now. (I dare say that's what makes it so hard to understand the delay in the resumption of public worship(?))

The agricultural imagery Our Lord utilized in his teaching, and did so quite often, suggests another way. It is the way of cultivation. It takes time. It takes patience. It takes share effort. It takes community. It takes subordination of personal preferences. It takes sacrifice. It takes paying attention to a world that we cannot completely bend to our wills.

Because something is being brought forth, life-sustaining nourishment is resulting. Both from our own efforts, and in response to factors – such as soil and wind and rain – beyond our immediate control. That being said, the farmer doesn't plant where there is no soil, no observed rainfall, no chance of sunlight. No, the farmer pays attention to the world around him. He accepts the data, the science. And then gets to work with what is known, and verifiable. Some philosophical types have suggested that pandemics bring humanity back to the realities of the world, and of life itself. Farmers can never afford to disconnect from that world, or from the force of life.

And a final thought – perhaps a seed planted for further growth – agriculture has as its root (that in and of itself is an agricultural image) the Latin word *cultus*. Ignore what modern-day religious and political extremists have made of the word cult. But understand that we cultivate things that matter to us. We can only truly live and thrive if the culture helps us know who we are and how we are to act. And worship, in the ancient sense of the word, is cult: what a people do together, for the good of all. All of these things are wrapped up in Our Lord's use of agricultural imagery, so prevalent in his preaching and teaching. He wants us to be strong, together. May God so bless us. As together, we cultivate real Christian community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Fr. Grogan