

BLESSED TRINITY CATHOLIC PARISH

St. Michael Church - Dane • St. Patrick Church - Lodi
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www.btcatholic.us



Sunday, March 22, 2020
Laetare Sunday (4th Sunday of Lent)

Dear Blessed Trinity Catholic Parish and School Staff, Parishioners, School Families, and Friends,

"Peace be with you!" These are some of the very first words that the Risen Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples shortly after His glorious resurrection, when He found them huddled together in a locked room and overwhelmed by discouragement, anxiety, and questions about the future following His heartbreaking crucifixion just days earlier. And these are the same words that the Risen Lord Jesus (and I as your pastor) want you to hear in these difficult days as we too are "locked up" in our homes (as we practice "social distancing" and live under a quarantine of sorts) and as we wrestle with our own fears and temptations to discouragement in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent social and economic challenges that it has brought with it. Please know that my hope and prayer for you right now is this: that in the midst of everything you will have the grace to hear the Risen Prince of Peace say to you personally, as if for the very first time, His consoling words *"Peace be with you!"* and *"I am with you always!"*

It goes without saying that we are currently living in one of the most unusual and trying times in recent history (and perhaps even in our lifetime). Certainly, this is not the Lent that any of us had in mind when a few weeks ago on Ash Wednesday we were marked with the sign of the cross and told "remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." And, yet, if we really believe that God is in control of all things – in other words, that He truly is God – then in a very real sense we must trust that in the mystery of His divine providence this is precisely the Lent that He has planned for us. This isn't to say that He desires to see us suffer for the sake of suffering or delights in our misfortune. No, not at all! He is good; in fact, He is Goodness itself! Rather, with the assurance of faith, we know that He is allowing this temporary affliction to unfold only because He can powerfully use it to bring about a greater spiritual and eternal good – just as He did with the passion and death of His only-begotten Son on that darkest of days that we now on the other side call *Good Friday*. So, the Risen Lord Jesus is able to stand in our midst and speak to us of His peace and invite us to embrace it and Him anew (just as He did with his anxious disciples nearly 2,000 years ago) precisely because He sees everything from the eternal perspective of God and from the other side of the resurrection. And when we choose to stand alongside Him in trusting faith, in the here and now, we too can begin to know His peace "that surpasses all understanding" because of our certainty that "the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us," and "that all things work together for the good of those who love God" (Philippians 4:7 and Romans 8:18 and 28).

So, despite our present circumstances and so much uncertainty, let us do all that we can to resist every temptation to discouragement, hopelessness, anxiety, fear, selfishness, and the like. Jesus Christ is risen! Heaven is our eternal hope and home! And absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of Christ...not even the Coronavirus pandemic or any subsequent challenge, economic or otherwise! Instead, as faith-filled Christians, let us continue to stay close to God in trusting prayer, let us continue to keep our eyes fixed firmly upon Him who is our strength, let us continue to follow and serve Him with persevering love, and let us ask Him to use these current events to bring about a great spiritual renewal in our own hearts and in those of our fellow Catholics and fellow Americans! *Jesus, help us to trust in You during these difficult days! Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts more like Your own! Jesus, give us the grace that we need to always remain faithful to you! And, Jesus, pour down upon us your divine peace!*

Nevertheless, despite this Easter hope that will sustain us both through this period of pandemic and its aftermath, at present we are going through a real and extended Holy Thursday night/Good Friday-like experience. The cross has suddenly become very real for us. And it is heavy. And one of the places where we feel its weight most acutely right now as faithful Catholics is in our inability to gather together for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. As you know Bishop Hying has prudently suspended the celebration of all *public* Masses in the Diocese of Madison (along with every other bishop in our country for their respective dioceses), following the expertise and advice of the CDC and other medical professionals who are knowledgeable about the Coronavirus and for the sake of the common good.¹ He has said that this was the hardest decision that he has ever had to make (and will ever have to make) as bishop because for us, “[as] Catholics, the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives.” Nevertheless, because of the nature of the Coronavirus and for the sake of the most vulnerable in our society and to ensure that we do not overwhelm our healthcare system at this crucial time Bishop Hying has made this very difficult decision to suspend all *public* Masses and I am most grateful for his leadership.

And, yet... Despite the wisdom and necessity of this decision I cannot help but feel a great sadness. And I am sure that you feel it also. It just isn't the same celebrating Holy Mass on Sunday in an empty church without you (and in front of a camera), just as it isn't the same for you having to watch Mass on television or streaming online instead of being united together around the altar and in the Real Presence of Jesus. But, this is the cross that God is asking all of us to carry at this particular time for reasons that He alone fully knows. This is a cross, however, that has not been unfamiliar to countless others down throughout the centuries, who for various reasons have been unable to attend Holy Mass or to receive the Holy Eucharist with the same ease and frequency that we have become so accustomed to and have probably taken for granted at times. In particular, I can't help but think about all of the many souls who have lived or still live in missionary lands where there was and is a substantial shortage of priests to celebrate Mass, or those who have lived or still live under a constant threat of persecution and risk their very lives every time they even mention the name of Jesus, or closer to home all of those many people who are unable to attend Mass with any regularity simply because of serious illnesses and failing health. Perhaps this period of “Eucharistic fasting” can be an occasion, then, of solidarity where we unite and offer up our very real sufferings of not being able to gather together for Mass for those brothers and sisters in faith who endure this same trial constantly without ever experiencing a blessed interruption.

¹ Furthermore, as you almost certainly know, President Trump and Governor Evers have issued directives that all public gatherings are to remain under 10 people to help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus at this time.

May it also be a time of resolve. With the Lord's help, let each of us resolve to never again take Sunday Mass or the Eucharist for granted. Rather, let us ask God to use this cross to help us to become even more of a "Eucharistic-centered people," whose hearts burn with love for and gratitude for the great gift of Holy Communion.

Earlier this week, as I was reflecting upon all of this, I read a moving article that was written by a young Catholic wife and mother of 4 who gave words to what so many faithful Catholics around the country are currently experiencing. I want to share with you some of her words that particularly struck me.

A life without the Eucharist has a gaping hole in it. And that hole is going to hurt. As time stretches on, and we don't know how long it will be before we're allowed to go to Mass...again, our yearning will expand – or it will wane. *We will grow passionate in our desire, or we will grow tepid in our indifference. This pandemic may be a turning point in our lives.* When the Eucharist is denied us, we may begin to see just how precious it is to us. We may realize just how centrally our lives revolve around it. How it strengthens and upholds us. Let us feel its loss deeply. Let us look forward to the day when we may receive him again. Matthew 9:15 says: "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." The bridegroom is taken from us this Lent. It is time to fast. We are in the desert. We hunger for him. *Let that hunger grow. ...And may we never take the attendance of Mass [or] the reception of Holy Communion...for granted again."*²

Amen, sister! Amen!

Having said all of this, I want to reiterate that even though we are unable to *publicly gather* to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as a community for the foreseeable future I will continue to celebrate/offer Mass privately on a daily basis. In doing so, I will continue to pray for the particular intentions of the day as well as for all of you, our nation, and our world. And, as you may have already seen, I am trying to record/livestream these Masses so that you can watch/pray along with them at home and as you are able. You will find more details about this below.

At this point I would like to touch upon a host of practical matters that will be of interest to you. Please note that what follows is my plan as of today (Sunday, March 22) and until we are able to return back to normal parish life together.³ But, given how rapidly things have been evolving over the past week and a half I ask that you please visit our website (www.btcatholic.us) and/or Facebook page (www.facebook.com/BTCatholic/) regularly to find updates.

² Sara Estabrooks
www.tojesussincerely.com/2020/03/16/i-cried-when-mass-was-cancelled/?fbclid=IwAR1dWRMWbBtTktS2TDQio4QY7PxcRPMehLApJTt6qsFhE2uKpV0VCv4

³ As we move into Holy Week and the Easter season, if the current restrictions remain in place, some of the following schedule/events may change. Please check our website and/or Facebook page for updates.

1. Live-streaming Masses

All Masses will be live-streamed (and/or recorded and posted online) until the suspension of their public celebration is lifted. You can view the Masses on our parish website (or on our parish and school Facebook page), either at their respective time of celebration or later in the day as the video footage is archived. The Mass schedule will be:

- Sundays – 9:00am
- Mondays – No live-stream/recorded Mass
- Tuesdays – 9:00am
- Wednesdays – 9:00am
- Thursdays – 9:00am
- Fridays – 9:00am
- Saturdays – 11:00am

Once again, please note that my celebration of these Masses at these times, following the Bishop's instructions, will be *private*. Please join me in prayer by watching along at home and making an act of spiritual communion.

An Act of Spiritual Communion:

My Jesus, I believe that You are really present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

2. "Parking Lot Adoration"

In order to provide opportunities to spend time with Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament while maintaining proper "social distancing" I will be offering "parking lot adoration." (Unusual times call for unusual solutions!) As such, I will be setting up a tent with a makeshift "altar" in the St. Patrick parking lot and will expose the Blessed Sacrament for adoration and personal prayer. You are invited to drive up (sort of like at the old drive-in movie theatres) and sit in your cars in front of Jesus, spending time with Him. *Weather permitting*, the parking lot adoration schedule will be:

- Tuesdays – 6:00 to 6:30pm
- Thursdays – 8:00 to 8:30am
- Fridays – 8:00 to 8:30am
- Sundays – 11:00am to Noon

3. “Drive thru Confessions”

In order to provide opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation while maintaining proper “social distancing” I will be offering “drive thru confessions” outside by the rectory garage at St. Patrick. Please drive up the rectory driveway (between the brick retaining wall and the basketball/tennis courts) and pull up next to me in your vehicle (or simply walk over to me if you park elsewhere). You are encouraged to remain in your vehicle and confess from your window, but if you prefer you may park and I will have a chair available for you to use while we still maintain a proper distance. When you are finished please exit by driving around the backside of the church building. *Weather permitting*, the drive thru confession schedule will be:

- Wednesdays – 8 to 8:30am and 5:00 to 6:00pm
- Saturdays – 9:00 to 10:00am
- By appointment

4. Other Online Prayer Events

The following prayer events will be live-streamed and/or recorded and posted to our parish website (and parish and school Facebook page):

- Stations of the Cross, Fridays – 12:00 Noon
- Vespers (Evening Prayer), Sundays – 6:00pm

5. Baptisms

At present we are still able to celebrate the sacrament of baptism and I would highly recommend having your child baptized as soon as possible – especially in light of the Coronavirus pandemic. That being said, current government restrictions limit the number of people who can be gathered in any one place to 9 or less (including me, the child to be baptized, the parents, and the godparents) so there may be legitimate and compelling reasons to want to delay the child’s baptism until these restrictions have been lifted so that more family and friends can be present. I simply urge all parents to exercise the virtue of prudence here, balancing your desire to celebrate the sacrament with family and friends with the great spiritual good that comes to your child through baptism and is especially desirable in uncertain and difficult times such as these. For more information about baptism in general please visit:

www.btcatholic.us/baptism-child

6. Anointing of the Sick

Because this sacrament is so important for those who are gravely ill I will gladly continue to anoint all of those who are in need of it, most especially those who find themselves in the last days or hours of their earthly lives. Please call me (608-592-5711, ext. 1) as soon as possible to arrange for an anointing and/or to discuss possible options.

7. Funerals

Once again, because of government restrictions that currently limit all gatherings to 9 or fewer people at present full funeral Masses are practically impossible. If you have a loved one who dies in the next few weeks please contact the funeral home and me ASAP to discuss all possible options. Also, as you would expect, we will not be having funeral luncheons for the foreseeable future.

8. Marriage Prep

To any and all couples who are preparing for marriage, please know that the Diocese has temporarily suspended all marriage prep classes. Please contact me ASAP if this affects you and we will look at other options that can be completed to fulfill the necessary requirements.

9. Parish Office Hours

The parish office will be closed except for Tuesdays (between the hours of 8:00-4:30pm) until we are able to return to normal parish life. All visitors are kindly asked to “buzz in” at the main entrance. If for some reason we have too many visitors here at once you may be asked to wait outside or return at a later time. As such, I suggest calling ahead on Tuesday mornings and speaking with Mary Gamer, our parish secretary, to make an appointment.

10. Reduced Staffing

Many parish staff members will be working reduced hours for the next few weeks. If you need to reach someone please call ahead and/or email them to set up an appointment.

As an aside, I want to thank all of the parish staff for the ways that they have helped me handle and navigate through the many challenges of the past 10 days. They probably don't hear me say it enough, but I am grateful to God for each of them.

11. The Parish Bulletin

We will not be producing a weekly parish bulletin until things return to normal. It just simply doesn't make sense to do so at this time given how rapidly things are changing (i.e., by the time we print it most of the information is outdated). Once again, please check our website and/or Facebook page for updated information.

12. Blessed Trinity Catholic School

Blessed Trinity Catholic School is closed indefinitely, following the most recent directives of Gov. Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. I hope and pray that we will be able to reopen before the end of the current school year but that remains to be seen and we will follow all government and diocesan instructions. I would like to publicly acknowledge and thank Deacon Michael, our principal, and all of our dedicated teachers and staff for so graciously and tirelessly handling the many challenges that we have faced over the past 10 days. It has not been easy, but they have been incredibly generous and flexible, and I am most grateful for their many sacrifices throughout. I also want to thank our school families. I know that this entire situation has not been without its own challenges for you and for your children. Please know of my prayers for all of you in a very special way in the days ahead.

13. The Roseanne Mills Gala

The 7th annual Roseanne Mills Gala was scheduled for Saturday evening, May 2nd at St. Michael. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic and the current government restrictions we are forced to postpone this highly anticipated and enjoyable event. Once we have a better sense as to when life will return to normal we will look to reschedule. Please watch for more information in the days and weeks ahead.

14. Other Regular Parish and School Activities

Please assume that all regular parish and school activities are cancelled for the time being. For more information about what we will be doing in their place, however, please visit our updated “Special Coronavirus Calendar”: www.btcatholic.us/parish-events

15. Tithing (and Online Giving)

I ask that you please remember the parish and *do what you can at this time* to continue to financially support the parish. I don't make this request lightly, as I know that many of you are and will be feeling the financial effects of personal job losses and our depressed economy in the days, weeks, and months ahead. At the same time the needs of the parish are real. Because of this pandemic we have already had to cancel our last 2 fish fries of the season, and without our normal and regular Sunday Mass offertory collections for the foreseeable future (including, possibly Easter) we will be looking at a major operating deficit going forward (and, obviously, there may be an even greater fallout the longer that this situation lasts). Thankfully, we have some savings and investments that will help us to weather the storm for a bit. And I will do all that I can to cut our expenses for the time being, which should also help some. But, these measures won't sustain us forever, and so once again I simply ask you to prayerfully consider what God might be asking of you and to do what you can in these difficult times, knowing the needs that you have for yourself and for your family.

For those who would like to continue to use regular offertory envelopes to support the parish you are welcome to mail them to the parish office, or drop them off on Tuesdays or in our mail bin in the entryway at St. Patrick.

For those who are comfortable making donations online I would like to suggest that you consider giving online (www.btcatholic.us/give). Just this past week we began using a new online giving platform that is safe, secure, and incredibly user friendly whether you are making a one-time gift or a recurring donation.

Thank you in advance for your generosity. Once again, I don't take it for granted, especially at this time.

16. Caring for one another

Lastly, I ask you to please look out for those who might be in need at this time. Pick up the phone and call someone. Send an email. Offer to pick up some groceries. Donate a roll of toilet paper (okay, that's a joke!). But the point is: many people are suffering right now and will continue to suffer the longer this pandemic period drags on. Let's look for creative ways to love people during these difficult days! For, as Jesus said, "this is how all will know that you are my disciples, by your love for one another" (John 13:35).

In closing, I want express my care and concern for each and every one of you. Even though we must be socially distanced from one another at this time I continue to carry all of you in my heart. Please know of my prayers for you and please continue to pray for me.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Scott

P.S. Once again, please check our website (www.btcatholic.us) and/or Facebook page regularly for updates! God bless you!