



The Shell

An e-letter for

Saint James the Greater Church,
3565 Hubble Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45247

June 17, 2020

Dear Friends,

Someone reminded me that I forgot to thank some people in the last few Shells. To fix that error... Thank you to everybody who is staying home! (I never thought I'd be glad people are not coming to church.) Those of you who are staying at home are taking care of yourselves and others. I appreciate that. We all do. Also, those who do not come on a particular weekend are leaving room in church for someone else.

We continue to suggest that people alternate weeks if they are coming to weekend Masses, and especially consider coming on a weekday instead. Our Sunday attendance is growing each week and is coming closer to the maximum number. If we reach that point, we will have to rethink our approach. It may not be possible to admit everyone who comes, or we will have to set up a system that directs who may or may not come on a particular weekend.

There are two things for your reflection, both effects of the Covid virus people may not think of right away. We probably didn't anticipate that Catholic schools would have to close permanently because of the virus. The Catholic News Service reported this:

"More than 100 Catholic elementary and secondary schools nationwide are expected to close by the fall, largely because of financial challenges resulting from the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic recession.

"Nearly every diocese probably is facing a closure. While we don't have it in stone, we think the closures as we speak are 100 to 150 schools," Mary Pat Donoghue, executive director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said June 12.

The second issue is close to my heart. In the protocols for almost every diocese in the country, priests older than 65 are encouraged to not distribute Communion. In some, they are ordered not to. In a few, they are told not to celebrate public Masses at all. There have been reports in the past few months about priests across the U.S. who have died from Covid. We elderly priests know that there is a greater risk for us and some of us will die before this is over. It is just one of the things I and every other older priest had to deal with as we reopened to public Masses. Please pray for us. (*See related question below.*)

New information for the Shell is getting sparse. I was asked if I was going to keep doing this every week. The answer is in the negative. We will be issuing a Shell when there is something new and significant to report.

Father Nolker

Questions and Answers

I have been asked a lot of questions during this time. Mostly, I don't have answers. If I have firm information, I am glad to share. But I can express my opinion on a few matters. My opinions might not have any more validity than anybody else's, but here are a few of the questions I have gotten many times.

- Q. How long do you think the dispensation from Sunday Mass will last?
- A. I think it might last at least through next winter unless there is new information about how the virus is spread and how to protect people against it. That could lengthen or shorten the dispensation. I think the bishops will be very careful about restoring the obligation.
- Q. Do you think we will stop public Masses again?
- A. Yes. The number of cases is growing quickly. The number of deaths is rising rapidly. I can see a situation in a few months where the whole "stay at home" response will be restored for everybody.
- Q. Why do you sit during the distribution of Holy Communion on Sundays and distribute on weekdays?
- A. I think I may have commented on this before. Because of my age and health issues, I am following the archbishop's advice to not distribute on Sundays. We have sufficient Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for the weekend Masses. On weekdays I distribute because, at 74, I am one of the younger people at Mass. It doesn't seem right to ask an 84 year old person to distribute while I sit down.
- Q. Will we reopen school on time and will it be like it used to be?
- A. We plan to open on schedule. Will it be the same as before? No. Details are still fluid because the recommendations keep changing as the medical data changes. The staff at our school is working very hard to make it as "normal" as possible.

Reminders

- 1) The Catholic faithful in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati **continue to be dispensed** from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass.
- 2) If someone wants to return to participation in Mass, they should seriously **consider attending a weekday Mass rather than weekend**. The congregation will probably be smaller.
- 3) **That one can go to Mass doesn't mean one should**.
- 4) Those who are at risk or fearful that they or their family might become sick **are encouraged to stay home** and join the Church by viewing Mass on TV or live-streamed Masses.