

My dear brothers and sisters,

May God grant you peace!

On Monday Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer announced that Catholic Churches in the Archdiocese of Atlanta may open for the celebration of public Masses beginning on Monday, May 25, 2020. I am happy to announce that we will celebrate public Masses beginning that day. Our first Sunday Mass will be on the Solemnity of Pentecost May 30/31, 2020.

While this is welcome news for Catholics in our Archdiocese, some may feel anxious and nervous about returning to Church, especially the elderly and those who have underlying health issues. These are legitimate and reasonable concerns. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass remains in effect until June 28, 2020. Therefore, no one should feel pressure to be physically present at Sunday Mass. I encourage those who are older and/or have health issues to stay at home and continue viewing the Mass via our live stream. In addition, since there is no obligation to attend Sunday Mass, those wanting to attend Mass may choose to come to a weekday Mass, where the numbers will most likely be smaller and therefore, a lower risk of contracting the coronavirus.

Opening the Church for public Masses does not mean that the pandemic is over. The coronavirus is still spreading, and we all need to be concerned about contracting the virus. We must do all that we can to prevent this from occurring. It is incumbent upon all of us to take seriously the guidelines and instructions that have been issued by federal, state, and local authorities, as well as by the Center for Disease Control and our Archdiocese. I cannot stress this enough. Our primary concern must be the safety, health and wellbeing of all our parishioners and visitors.

We will do everything we can to prepare for the reopening of our Church, including the cleaning and sanitizing of our worship space, bathrooms, and gathering space. We have also made decisions regarding our Mass schedule and protocols for Mass attendance. I ask you to please follow all the protocols we will put in place, to be patient, and understanding. These decisions have been made for your benefit and the benefit of all who desire to gather for the celebration of Mass.

We have no idea how many parishioners and others will choose to return to Mass when the Church is open. Because of social distancing requirements we know that we will not be able to accommodate large assemblies. Our best estimate is that our Church will be able to seat between 130 to 150 worshippers at one time. Although members of a household can sit together, all others must practice social distancing of at least six feet. Those who choose to return to Mass must be willing to follow the instructions of the ministers who have volunteered to assist us in guiding and directing worshippers. This is extremely important for reasons of safety but also to ensure that our worship experience is reverent and harmonious.

For the time being we are altering our Mass schedule. This is necessary because of the need to clean and sanitize all the areas of the Church that will be used. Our new Mass schedule is as follows:

4 p.m. Saturday Vigil Mass (English)

7 a.m. Sunday Mass (English)

10 a.m. Sunday Mass (English)

1 p.m. Sunday Mass (Spanish)

4 p.m. Sunday Mass (English)

7 p.m. Sunday Mass (Spanish)

After our first weekend, we can determine if we need to increase or decrease the number of Masses. Our daily Mass schedule remains the same, except that we have added an additional Spanish Mass on Tuesday evening at 7:30 p.m.

We have also decided to have drive thru Confessions beginning at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday mornings. Spanish Confessions will be heard in front of the Hartmayer Portico and English Confessions will be heard outside of the San Damiano Building. Celebrating the Sacrament outside provides a safer environment for both priest and penitent. Please remain in your car and speak to the priest from your rolled down window. Feel free to wear a mask, though one is not required because of the distance. At this time, we will discontinue Confessions in the Church. Of course, you may also call the office and request an appointment with a priest for Confession.

With this letter, I am including the "Procedures and Protocols for Attending Mass." Please review them before coming to Mass. Archbishop Hartmayer has released a video demonstrating what to expect when you arrive for Mass and what is being expected from you. The link for the video is on our webpage, please view the video before coming to Mass. I respectfully ask that you comply with the new procedures and protocols as an act of charity and love of neighbor. We do not want anyone to become ill as a result of attending Mass.

Archbishop Hartmayer has asked that the churches be open for individual prayer and adoration. At this time, he has not given permission for groups to meet in the Church for prayer or devotions. For individual prayer and adoration, we ask that you bring sanitizing wipes and wipe down the pew or chair that you used and any other hard surfaces that you touched. You must practice social distancing and you should wear a mask. During the week, the Church will open in time for Morning Prayer and Mass and will be closed at 8:30 p.m.

The last two months have been difficult for all of us. Most of us are eager for things to return to normal. This will not fully happen until a treatment, cure, and vaccine for the coronavirus is found. In the meantime, we need to be cautious in the choices we make, especially regarding social distancing, wearing masks, and practicing good hygiene.

Please pray that the reopening of our Church and the resumption of public Masses will be smooth and harmonious. We certainly look forward to seeing you and worshipping together once again. I want to thank you in advance for your cooperation, compliance, and charity. Be assured of my prayers, love, and affection.

Sincerely,

Your Pastor,

Fr. John