

October 8, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

One day about two weeks ago, I was doing some shopping. I was at a local store and purchased some masks, hand sanitizer, and dog food – essential pandemic supplies! While I was shopping, I noticed that the store was beginning to display Christmas items. Although it seemed early to be thinking about Christmas, the truth is, Christmas had already been on my mind for about six weeks. I have been thinking a lot about Christmas, in particular, how St. Andrew Parish will prepare for Christmas Masses while the COVID-19 threat persists. It is becoming increasingly evident to me that the coronavirus will not be gone by Christmas. Rather, I predict that there will not be a vaccine widely available in December. I predict that social distancing, wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, and disinfecting surfaces before and after every Mass will still be required. I predict that the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass will still be in effect at Christmas, and that those people in a higher risk category will still be strongly encouraged to avoid large crowds and discouraged from attending Church. I predict that the maximum number of people allowed in St. Andrew Church will still be 300, and that every other pew will still be closed to insure proper distancing. I predict that the doors of the church will still be standing open and that the temperature will be frigid. I predict that there will be very little of the traditional pageantry and ceremony we are accustomed to at any of our Christmas Masses: no choir, no choristers, no fanfare, no choral program or carol singing, no incense, no blessing of the Christmas crib – only simple Masses celebrated in the manner that has become the "new normal" on Sundays. I predict that these Masses will be livestreamed so they can be viewed at home. I predict that the Parish Hall will not be available to have a second Mass because that space will still be occupied by classrooms. And I am worried because Christmas Masses, especially vigil Masses, usually attract huge crowds that we can barely accommodate even when there are no restrictions. What will happen if 1,000 or more people show up for the 4 p.m. vigil Mass on Christmas Eve and we only have room for 300? I am afraid there may be a riot!

I have shared my concerns with other priests, the Bishop, and our Liturgy Committee. We have considered a variety of options like requiring reservations and tickets, or having loudspeakers outside, or having an "overflow" area in the gym with another Mass. Before making any final decisions on how to prepare, the Liturgy Committee suggested surveying parishioners about your plans to attend Christmas Mass "in person" while the pandemic threat continues. In the bulletin today, you will find information about this survey. I ask everyone to respond to this survey and let me know your intentions regarding Christmas Mass attendance given all of the factors I predicted above. The survey is short and easy and the information you provide will be very helpful as we make decisions about our Christmas Vigil and Christmas Day Masses. The deadline for completing the survey is October 26. Thank you for responding to this survey and stay tuned for further developments!

Your Pastor,
Msgr. Stephan Moloney