



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

26 May 2020

## **A Gradual Return to Publicly Celebrated Mass**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is now more than two months since I made the painful but necessary decision to cancel all public celebrations of the Mass in order to help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. My first message to you now is one of gratitude for your patience and understanding during this unprecedented restriction. Separation from actual reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the very heart of our Catholic way of life, has been very painful. I am grateful for the graciousness with which you have accepted this measure.

Now that the Province of Alberta has initiated its phased relaunch strategy, I am pleased to announce that our parishes will begin inviting you back to Mass in small numbers in this first stage. Parishes that have made the necessary preparations will be able to begin offering weekday masses on Monday, June 1, the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and Sunday masses as of June 7, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

A new set of liturgical directives has been developed by the Bishops of Alberta to guide us through Stage One of the relaunch. They have a two-fold aim: the worthy and reverent celebration of the Eucharist in accordance with Church norms; and the safety of everyone through protocols that align with the health measures stipulated by civic authorities. The Bishops have been consulting regularly with medical specialists, and our decisions have been informed by their thoughtful and measured professional advice. We have full confidence in their expertise. Please be assured that we remain committed to doing everything we can to protect our parishioners, church staff, and clergy from infection. This will mean high levels of diligence and extra safety protocols at each parish.

These will include:

- Limiting the total number of participants at each Mass to 50, or fewer if that is required to ensure physical distancing
- Asking attendees to answer a series of health and travel-related questions as recommended by Alberta Health Services
- Recording names and contact information of attendees for the purpose of contact tracing if necessary
- Sanitizing hands upon entry and exit
- Observing physical distancing throughout the celebration
- Extra cleaning of the church between masses
- Wearing of masks will be required for those who wish to receive Communion

We will need to demonstrate that we have succeeded in providing a safe environment for Mass with small groups before we can proceed to the next stage and open masses to larger assemblies. For that reason, I ask once more for your patience and understanding as we take these first steps. Since the size and resources of our parishes vary greatly across the Archdiocese, it may be that some parishes will not be able to accommodate public celebrations of the Mass just yet.

I want to offer a special word of encouragement to those who are most vulnerable at this time: parishioners who are over 65 years of age, have any symptoms of illness, or who have underlying health conditions that put you at greater risk. On the advice of the Chief Medical Officer, I am recommending that you not return to Mass in this early stage. Please be assured, however, that you remain in our prayers, and that you are still excused from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass. We shall continue to offer a livestreamed Mass from St. Joseph's Basilica on Sundays at 10:30 a.m., particularly for all those not able to attend in person. Your own parish may also be providing masses online.

I encourage you to reach out to your pastor if you need any help or just a listening ear at this time. You are always welcome at the parish, especially under these trying conditions.

I also want to thank all of you who have contacted us with inquiries about plans for the resumption of Masses. I have been deeply touched by your longing for the Eucharist and the other sacraments. They are privileged spaces and occasions for an encounter with the Lord himself, and I have heard clearly how important they are to you.

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Even if you are not able to attend a Eucharistic celebration in these early days, you are still welcome to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I invite you to contact your parish for confession times or an appointment.

Soon we shall celebrate Pentecost Sunday, when we commemorate the day the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and empowered them to proclaim the Gospel. By this wondrous gift, the Risen Lord Jesus remains always with his people, giving us new life and filling us with fresh hope. May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace we need to face this current situation with confidence and charity.

I look forward to the day when we can all be together again, celebrating joyfully in our beloved parishes. May the peace of the Risen Lord be with you all.

Sincerely in Christ,



✠Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton