



Dear Friends,

Once again COVID raises its head like a cobra ready to strike. The cases rise; the death toll mounts; and our fears increase as we hear the governor “request” that we quarantine for the next 3 weeks. Fear (the handmaid of threat) stalks us in all we do these days. More and more people are wearing masks and sanitizing shopping carts and washing hands. Fear of becoming a statistic of this pandemic pushes us to keep our distance as much as possible.

In our parish many still fear coming together despite all the precautions we have taken to keep folks safe. I totally understand that since we cannot guarantee that no one will catch the disease in our churches. There’s always the possibility of a person being a carrier without even knowing it. We can see the results of this fear in the dwindling number of people who come to church. One daily Mass this past week had only 2 people and the number of people attending our weekend Masses doesn’t reach the permitted 15-20% capacity of the building.

Another side effect has to do with the volunteers who sanitize the churches after use. After each Mass, baptism, funeral or adoration the church needs to be sanitized. That process can take about 20 to 40 minutes or even an hour to accomplish depending on which church and how many people have attended. Currently, I am told, we have only 7 people, tops, who are regular volunteers for sanitizing. And not all of those 7 are always available.

On weekdays we have only 2 volunteers! Two people to sanitize after each Mass; the same people have to sanitize after adoration on Tuesday night; and the same two people who cover funerals as well. If on a given week those two people have to sanitize the daily Masses, help at one or two of the weekend Masses, plus Tuesday night adoration and one or two funerals, we are asking way too much of those good people. Something has to give.

Looking to the future, the lack of volunteers will impact our Guadalupe and Christmas celebrations. Fr. David told us that he has been working with the Guadalupe Committee people to plan this very important feast for our Hispanic community. Much of the festivities had to be reduced or eliminated, a move dictated by COVID. Each of those Guadalupe church services requires a clean-up team. As of this writing we are waiting to see if people will step forward.

I had hoped we could use the same schedule we did last Christmas for this Christmas with 4 Masses on Christmas Eve and another 4 on Christmas Day. However, with only 7 volunteers, we can’t do that. Instead, we have had to eliminate one Mass on Christmas Eve (the 5:30), and another may have to be removed on Christmas Day. And we may need to cut even more. To keep last year’s schedule with only 7 volunteers would put an impossible strain on those volunteers, if they would even be willing to do it at all! If we could get 2 people trained for each Mass, we would have what we need. Without that, not everyone who would like to attend Christmas Mass will be able to do so. Sadly, like Joseph and Mary not finding a room in the inn, some of our people may find there’s no room in the pews.

In the short term, given the current situation with the virus, we will keep things as they are for the rest of this month. We will once again visit the question of the number of Masses at the beginning of December. If nothing has changed, if no more volunteers come forward to serve their fellow parishioners, then I will be forced to start cutting Masses — including the Christmas Masses.

I do not like reducing the Mass schedule. As long as the coronavirus requires us to sanitize the churches after use, we don't have an option. Unless more members of our parish are willing to serve their fellow parishioners by helping to sanitize the churches, these changes will be inevitable. While I understand the fear, giving in to it has consequences. It is completely up to you, my fellow parishioners, how this will turn out. I ask you to search your hearts and pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit. The reign of this virus will end, but not for many months. Until we are freed from this pandemic, we have to keep up the fight.

*Fr. Denis*