



THE CORONA VIRUS AND THE LITURGY...

Fr. Ed Hislop

The growing concern regarding the **CORONA VIRUS** pandemic touches all of us in many ways, not the least of which is our “full, conscious and active participation” at Mass.

As of this writing (March 10, 2020) there are no reported incidents of the virus in Montana nor in the states surrounding us. Nevertheless it is a serious concern and we can presume that it will soon reach Montana and Missoula. Therefore it is vital that we begin to prepare and take reasonable precautions, most of which are already prescribed at Blessed Trinity and Spirit of Christ.

At this time **Bishop Vetter** has not authorized any changes in our normal celebration of the Eucharist. He has written the following to all the pastoral leaders of the Diocese of Helena:

Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion continue to practice good hygiene by washing their hands before Mass begins and possibly using an antibacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. Parishioners are to be assured that if they are sick or experiencing symptoms of sickness they are not obliged to attend Mass, indeed, out of charity, they ought not attend.

(A subsequent statement from Bishop Vetter has been issued on March 11. That statement is published in the March 15 Bulletin.)

MASS, COMMUNION SERVICES AND MINISTRY AT NURSING CARE FACILITIES AND HOSPITALS

Effective immediately the **Friday Mass at Village Health Care Center** is cancelled; Communion visits by our volunteer Pastoral Care ministers are not permitted at **Hillside Nursing care facility**. These policies are mandated by the state of Montana due to potential Corona Virus infection. Volunteers

are not permitted into the facilities for the duration of the “pandemic.” Communion Services at **Village Senior Residence** *may* also need to be cancelled in the future. Both Missoula **Hospitals** are developing protocols for dealing with the virus and patient visits.

FOR THE TIME BEING...

AT BLESSED TRINITY AND SPIRIT OF CHRIST:

IF YOU ARE ILL or experience symptoms of the flu or respiratory issues, or even a cold, it is recommended that you **remain at home**, rather than attending Mass (or any other activity, where others are gathered).

It is also appropriate to use hand sanitizers regularly, particularly before coming to communion (bring some with you).

THE SIGN OF PEACE AT MASS: This is an integral and important element of our celebration of **Mass**. As a normal practice it is not expected that persons move around the church to share the kiss of peace. The liturgical directives have long stated that the **sign of peace be offered only to those nearby**. We encourage, in every instance, this principle. **There is no indication at this time that the normal manner of sharing the sign of peace should be changed.** Normally it is expressed with a handshake or an embrace—this is appropriate and acceptable. The directives in the Roman Missal state it this way: “*And all offer one another a sign, in keeping with local custom, that expresses peace, communion, and charity...*” Words do not necessarily need to be spoken, but if they are a simple “liturgical greeting” should be given, such as, “Peace be with you.” This is not a time for visiting or communicating about other issues. Since the church’s liturgical directives do not require a handshake or even an embrace,

should circumstance dictate another manner of sharing due to the Corona Virus, that will be recommended when and if appropriate. The Sign of Peace, however, will not be removed from the liturgy.

HOLY COMMUNION.

Eating and drinking of the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ is integral to the celebration of Mass. It is, indeed, the very purpose of our eucharistic gathering. In so doing we become what we eat and drink...we become, together, with the whole Church, the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ. The fullness of the Eucharistic sign is communion of both consecrated bread and consecrated wine. While Communion of the consecrated wine from a common chalice, is often cited by some as problematic, numerous studies have shown otherwise. The **CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL** has reported that there is *"no documented transmission of any infectious disease having ever been traced to the use of a common communion cup..."* *"...the risk of infectious disease transmission by a common communion cup is very low, and appropriate safeguards – that is, wiping the interior and exterior rim between communicants, use of care to rotate [both the cup and] the cloth during use, and use of a clean cloth for each service – would further diminish this risk. In addition, churches may wish to consider advising their congregations that sharing the communion cup is discouraged if a person has an active respiratory infection (i.e., cold or flu) or moist or open sores on their lips."*

It is probable that if the **Corona Virus** is diagnosed in Montana that there will be a recommendation from the Diocese of Helena, as a precautionary measure, to suspend Holy Communion of the consecrated wine during the time the virus is active. When and if that does occur **Blessed Trinity and Spirit of Christ**, with the other parishes and Catholic institutions of the Diocese of Helena will suspend the use of the common chalice, for a determined period of time.

AS A GENERAL RULE, when a person is ill and participating at Mass, they should refrain from receiving from the Chalice, even though the risk is so low that is undetectable.*

Also likely will be the recommendation that the Eucharistic Bread, the Body of Christ, be received only in the hand and NOT on the tongue. Reception on the tongue is much more likely to pass on disease.



*A study of 681 persons found that people who receive Communion from the common cup as often as daily are not at higher risk of infection compared with persons who do not receive communion or persons who do not attend Christian church services at all.



Bulletin Insert March 15, 2020
The Third Sunday of Lent

AND SO WE PRAY...

Lord our God, you sent your Son into the world to bear our infirmities and to endure our sufferings.

For all the peoples of this good earth who are sick, we ask that your blessing will give them strength to overcome their weakness through the power of patience and the comfort of hope, and that with your aid and the care of doctors, nurses and caregivers they will soon be restored to health.

Keep us all safe, fill us with healing peace.

Help us to hear and trust your words: "Do not be afraid."

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

The Book of Blessings: Prayer for the Sick, p. 127 adapted