

Dear wonderful parishioners of the Church of St. Raphael,

I hope you are doing well in the Lord and that this Lent has been a time of blessing and spiritual purification for you, as is God's loving will. So far I haven't heard of anyone in the parish being sick from COVID-19, but I know that some of you are suffering from other grave illnesses. Let's pray for each other, and especially remember those whose names are in the PLEASE PRAY FOR section in our parish bulletin each week, as well as those who are suffering from a decline in income and other issues related to the pandemic.

Thanks to all of you who have sent messages letting us know that you appreciate the daily reflections and Sunday homilies that Fr. Altier and I have been writing. Anything good in them comes from God, so I give glory to him. We will keep on writing those, God willing. I would like to thank Parish Business Administrator Ginny Metzger for emailing them and Administrative Assistant and Bulletin Editor Marie Nachtsheim for putting them on our website.

Thanks as well to all of you who have continued to support our parish in this difficult time, in prayer, financially and in other ways. I'm guessing that some of you have been contributing extra to make up for those who can no longer do so because of recent financial hardships. And to those of you who can no longer contribute because of recent financial setbacks, that's OK. Be at peace.

Please know that I continue to pray for all of you, including at the Mass I celebrate each day. You may be far from my eyes, but you are in my heart.

Archbishop Hebda sent a letter and memo to us priests yesterday evening, letting us know, among other things, that the prohibition of public Masses in churches in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis will continue at least through the Octave of Easter. That means through Divine Mercy Sunday, April 19th. While this is probably no surprise to any of us, it is a source of sorrow. Not that I think the Archbishop is mistaken in his decision, but I know it is painful for so many people to have to go without physically participating in Holy Mass for so long.

The Archbishop wrote that he presumes the prohibition of public Masses in churches will be extended further, but that's up in the air at this point.

The Archbishop also wrote: "Until an Archdiocesan-wide protocol can be developed for the safe and dignified distribution of Holy Communion, Communion is not to be distributed at outdoor Masses, regardless of whether the faithful remain in their cars, or at "drive through" Communion services, or in any other public fashion."

Blessed palms should be available after 3:00 pm this coming Sunday, on tables in the East Gathering Space. If you come to pick up a palm branch, please take with you any palm that you touch, and make sure to maintain the six-foot social distancing norm.

Looking ahead to Divine Mercy Sunday, this year St. Raphael's will not be having a Divine Mercy Service as in past years, but there will be confessions at the same time as has been the case each Sunday during Lent, from 3:00 to 4:00 pm. I will stay later if need be. As with all confessions during this time of the pandemic, please remember to keep a distance of six feet from other people, other than members of your immediate family whom you live with, who probably have all your germs already. Also, I realize that you are closer to six feet from the priest when you are in the confessional, but I taped a sheet of

plastic over the grill on top of the sheets of fabric, which should prevent any viruses from passing from the confessor to penitent or vice versa. Before going in the confessional and after leaving, please make use of the hand sanitizer in the bottles on the tables outside the confessionals, and don't go to confession if you are sick or have a cough or are sneezing. If you aren't feeling well and have grave sin to confess, you can make a perfect act of contrition elsewhere and go to confession when you are healthy again. Please remember that venial sins are forgiven, by God's mercy, just by asking Him. You don't have to go to confession for that. Please also remember that if you are looking to get the Divine Mercy plenary indulgence by going to confession on this day, please keep in mind the new plenary indulgence during the coronavirus pandemic, announced recently by the Vatican. You can see the details in our March 29th parish bulletin. For this indulgence, the usual requirement to attend Mass (except electronically/remotely), receive Communion and individually confess sins and receive sacramental Communion, usually within 8 days before or after, is waved for this pandemic indulgence, as long as people seeking it intend to go to confession, attend Mass and receive Holy Communion "as soon as possible," with no time limit attached.

I would like to close with something that our Archbishop wrote that I agree with 100 percent and hope you will find encouraging:

The Catechism reminds us that God Himself is not bound by His sacraments (CCC 1257) and history and experience teach that God pours out more grace in times of difficulty and trial. I am confident that today's crisis can be an extraordinary moment of grace even though we cannot receive Holy Communion at Mass as normal...Let us support each other in prayer as we prepare for Holy Week and the Great Triduum.

Peace in Christ,
Fr. Michael Rudolph, Pastor
Church of Saint Raphael
7301 Bass Lake Road
Crystal MN 55428
763-537-8401
<mailto:frmichaelrudolph@straphaelcrystal.org>

As it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed this to us through the Spirit." 1 Corinthians 2:9-10