

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY

LITURGICAL UPDATE

23 MARCH 2021

As we approach Holy Week and the wonderful season of Easter, we can give thanks that many of us will be able to celebrate the great events that brought our salvation “in person.” We recall well how things were this time last year! At the same time, we remember our brothers and sisters who, for various reasons and causes, are still not able to be with us in person. Also at the same time, we can take note of how the various health and governmental institutions have altered or modified guidelines as the pandemic situation continues to evolve in more positive steps.

Furthermore, many of us are very conscious of thinking how we can move forward with, and also help shape, whatever the “new normal” might be. This is true especially with a sense of building on the insights and discoveries that we have gained and also of encouraging a renewed sense of discipleship and of being disciple-makers.

With all this in mind, below are given some initial updates and information regarding the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments. As always, these may well change given the constantly evolving nature of the pandemic.

Capacity and Social Distancing:

- As we know, both the CDC and the NYS government have modified a number of health regulations and points of advice. Most notably, the percentage capacity for “places of worship” has been increased, although the six-foot requirement remains in place. However, as noted in past liturgical updates, what finally determines the real or actual capacity of a church is exactly the social distancing, that is a six-foot requirement. Until that changes, most of our churches, in effect, can accommodate somewhere between 25% to 35% of their seating capacity, in order to maintain the required social distancing.
- In a similar vein, regarding distancing, it should be noted that, at present, the new three-foot rule applies only to schools and even then, it is hedged with various considerations and protocols. As yet, a possible change to having a three-foot distancing in churches and places of worship has not been announced, nor given, by health or governmental bodies.

The Celebration of the Mass: Reopening Options from last year and our current situation

- Late last Spring, an option for the distribution Holy Communion at the end of Mass rather than at the usual time during Mass was allowed in the Reopening Guidelines (for example see: *Guidelines for the Gradual Reintroduction of Public Liturgies and Worship, Initial Stage, 5/21/20*). **Given the current situation, this option should not be continued except in cases of a demonstrable serious need or reason, from the Second Sunday of Easter 2021.**

- Late last Spring, an option for “Parking Lot Masses” was given, reflecting the circumstances then; that is of the initial resumption of public worship after the lockdown (*cf. Guidelines* mentioned above and *Notes about Drive-in Masses or Drive-up Holy Communion*, 5/23/20). **Given the current situation, this option should not be continued except in cases of demonstrable serious need or reason, from the Second Sunday of Easter 2021.**
- A practice also developed of distributing Holy Communion in a place (such as a church parking lot) after the Mass has been celebrated via live-streaming or other media. **Given the current situation, this option practice not be continued except in cases of a demonstrable serious need or reason, from the Second Sunday of Easter 2021.**

Holy Week and Easter

A reminder that detailed guidelines were issued on 22 February 2021 and the usual (annual) *Lent, Holy Week and Easter Guidelines* can be found on the Diocesan portal, Prayer and Worship Office). Also to note: all guidelines and updates that have been issued can be found on the Diocesan Portal.

A few questions have arisen regarding Holy Week, the Sacred Triduum and Easter...

- The sprinkling of holy water during the renewal of the baptismal promises is certainly permitted, provided that the holy water remains pure and uncontaminated
- Good Friday intercessions. The Bishop has given permission to use the additional intercession as was done last year (see Appendix A)

Other liturgical items:

- There are a number of new and additional optional *memoriae* that have been added to the General Calendar by Pope Francis:
 - St. Gregory of Narek: 27th February
 - St. John De Avila: 10th May
 - St. Hildegard of Bingen: 17th September
 - St. Faustina Kowalska: 5th October
- The obligatory *memoria* of St. Martha (29th July), will now be the obligatory *memoria* of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus
- The English translation of the corpus of hymns for the *Liturgy of the Hours* (Second Edition) has been confirmed for the United States by the Congregation for Divine

Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments. Work is in progress to produce and publish the new hymnal

APPENDIX A

XI. For all our nation and the world during pandemic

Let us pray, dear brothers and sisters, to God, the Father Almighty, trusting in His love and providence, that He may continue to strengthen and to guide us in this time of difficulty and great need.

Prayer in silence. Then the priest says

Almighty God, who sent us Jesus, your Son as our divine physician and savior, hear our heartfelt prayers for those who have fallen ill, for those who have died, for those who are vulnerable and fearful, and for those who work for healing; that we may be sure in faith, strong in hope, perfected in love, and so experience the grace of deliverance.

Through Christ, our Lord.

R. Amen