

Dear brothers and sisters,

Please allow me a few words before the reopening of the three parishes.

As you already know, Governor Baker and the Archdiocese of Boston decided last Monday to reopen the Churches. From that moment on, Father Andrea and I, together with the members of the Pastoral Council of the three parishes, and a good number of volunteers, got down to work to be able to celebrate this weekend.

Our collaborative was granted permission to reopen last Thursday, when we were able to demonstrate that we met the requirements established by the Governor and the Archdiocese itself. These guidelines and requirements are especially aimed at ensuring the safety of all who come to celebrate the Eucharist this weekend.

The good news I can give you is that we are already going to celebrate Masses this weekend, (May 23-24) following the regular schedule of Sundays in the three parishes. Masses will have some restrictions due to this pandemic to ensure the safety of all of you. For this reason, the masses will have several aspects that will make the experience of attending mass quite different from what we are used to.

Regarding the preparations, I would like to explain to you the main steps that have been taken to ensure that our parishes and assemblies will be safe this weekend and with guarantees of a healthy and welcoming environment.

- Since Monday we have been cleaning parishes thoroughly. A disinfectant that was suggested by the authorities has been used to ensure that all surfaces are germ-free. Special care has been taken to disinfect the benches and kneelers where you are sitting.
- We are preparing a group of volunteers who are in charge of directing your movements from the first moment they arrive at the parish.
- We have indicated the benches where you will be able to sit so that a good distance of security can be maintained. The parish of St. Mary's can accommodate a maximum of 120 people; St. Thomas Aquinas' also 120, and OL of Lourdes' up to 180 people, being the parish with the largest space. A volunteer will keep count of the people who arrive so that the allowed number is not exceeded.
- Your accesses and movements within the parish have been signposted. All will enter through the only main door of the Church, and will exit through the doors that will be marked with the "exit" sign.
- Upon entering the Church, a volunteer will help you disinfect your hands with hand sanitizer. If you are wearing gloves, we will ask you to remove them before entering.
- The use of a mask is mandatory within the Church.

Regarding liturgies, they will also have some changes. The most important are:

- Access to the sacristy is prohibited, even for ministers and readers. On the side table of the altar will be the necessary things for each mass, but only the designated minister will be able to prepare the bread and wine.
- You will not be able to sing as we are used to. The rule imposed by the Governor is that the faithful do not sing to avoid the spread of breath droplets.
- You will not have access to missalettes, song books, song sheets, bulletins (maybe next week you will), and the diocesan newspaper.

- You will sit in the designated places on the benches. We have also designated some special spaces for people with difficulties to walk.
- There will be pass the baskets for collection. Before leaving the church, you will be asked to leave your contributions in a trash can that you will find at the exit doors.
- For communion we will ask everyone to make a line keeping the distance of security. Those who do not receive Communion will receive a blessing. Those who receive Communion will do it on the hand. That will be the only time the mask can be lowered (when they arrive in front of the minister.)
- After the blessing, we will ask people to leave in order, keeping the distance of security, and without stopping to talk and socialize with other people.

Regarding online masses, our idea is to help people who are most vulnerable and who cannot attend mass. In this regard, I would like to add one thing: online masses are being essential to keep your faith in this difficult time. However, the parish should not become a virtual reality. We are the Body of Christ, and as such we must meet and be part of that mystical body and make it visible. For this reason, I wholeheartedly encourage you to have faith and trust in the Lord and begin little by little to attend parish celebrations. Of course, we will try together to help you feel safe.

We remind you that attendance at daily Masses in English and Spanish is allowed for all of you at the main church of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish. The most vulnerable people can follow them on our YouTube channel "St Thomas Aquinas Parish". During those daily masses the same security protocols as for Sunday masses will be followed. We will try to restart the confessions on Saturdays from 3 to 4 in the Chapel of Santo Tomás starting on Saturday, May 30. The adorations of the Most Holy are suspended until further notice.

Until both our parishes and the State of Massachusetts are completely reopened, all our broadcasts on our YouTube Channel will be made from Saint Thomas:

- Sundays, Mass in English at 10 am and Mass in Spanish at 12:30 pm.
- Monday to Friday: Masses in English at 12:00 pm.
- Masses during the week in Spanish at 7:00 pm (only Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.)
- Divine Mercy Chaplet bilingual; every day at 3:00pm.
- Rosary in Spanish: Sundays at 8:30pm.

During the next few weeks, if there is someone who is unable to come to Mass and would like to receive the Eucharist or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, please contact the rectory, and one of the priests will contact you.

Finally, I remind you that the financial needs of the parishes are extreme. I ask that you be generous with your contributions. People who do not come to mass can continue to contribute financially (as many have been doing so far). The best way is to send a check payable to your parish (to any of the three), but to the address of Saint Thomas Aquinas (97 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130). Another way is to use the online methods found on our website catholicjproxbury.com. We are trying to improve those methods to make them more available and easier in the future. You may also personally bring your contribution to the rectory of Santo Tomás during the week during office hours, or deposit it in the mailbox on the side door of the rectory. The most vulnerable people can even ask us to go to their houses to collect their contributions, if they call the rectory.

Thank you. See you soon!

Pray for us. P. Carlos.