

Holy Trinity Catholic Church

409 CHERRY STREET
COLUMBIA, PENNSYLVANIA 17512

March 12, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters of Holy Trinity,

This is about concerns in the current times of a bad flu season and the coronavirus.

First, as we have already experienced, the Bishop has directed the omission of the Sign of Peace and the suspension of the distribution of the Precious Blood at all celebrations of the Mass. Beginning next weekend, we are directed to remove the holy water from the fonts. Small bottles of holy water will be made available for families to use among themselves, and to use at home. As of a few weeks ago, hand sanitizer has been available in the vestibule of the main entrance. Please be mindful of recommendations from the healthcare community for keeping your hands clean. Sneeze/cough into a tissue or your elbow (not your hand!), keep your hands away from your face, etc.

Second, the pastor and extraordinary ministers wash their hands before Mass, and the ministers use hand sanitizer in their pew before communion. The faithful have the right to receive communion on the tongue or in the hand. While claims are varied as to which is less likely to spread illness, at this time the diocese *recommends* receiving in the hand, but does not require it.

Third, and most importantly, the obligation to attend Mass is always subject to a reasonable expectation. If it is truly unreasonable for someone to attend Mass, they are relieved of the obligation. This would include unsafe driving conditions, unforeseen emergencies, etc., including a genuine health concern given the current conditions, especially for those with compromised immune systems, and those responsible for their care, *and those exhibiting symptoms of contagious illness*. This is not a “get out of Mass free” card. The obligation is still binding on those who are healthy and able.

For those who are thus *unable* to attend Mass, it *is not* a sin, and does not need to be confessed before worthily receiving communion in the future. However, a reasonable spiritual alternative is required. Mass is available via television and social media. The readings and many reflections and prayers are available via the internet. Make *some* spiritual sacrifice that lifts your hearts, minds, and spirits to the Lord on His holy day.

Lastly, I would like to end with a quote I was recently sent, originally from Steve Bollman, Founder and President of *Paradisus Dei* (which provides the "That Man is You" program)...

“I applaud all the steps that are being taken by medical science to halt the spread of the coronavirus. I am incredibly disappointed by an almost nonexistent call to prayer.

We should all heed the medical advice and take appropriate simple actions to lessen the risk of contracting or passing on the coronavirus. At the same time that we take practical action, we need to take spiritual action. Interestingly enough, the original spread of the coronavirus relates to two major feast days of Our Lady. The first reported case was on December 8, the

Feast of the Immaculate Conception. On December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the second reported case.

In "days of old" when "pestilence" broke out, there would be a call for prayer and fasting to halt the pestilence and for recovery of those afflicted. I think we need to turn to Our Lady. The Rosary has been an incredibly important weapon in times of need for Christianity. This Lent, I ask you to say the Rosary every day for the halt of the coronavirus and the full and speedy recovery of all those afflicted. I also think it appropriate during Lent to add a sacrifice or fast to your prayers."

With prayers and blessings,

Fr. Stephen P. Kelley
Pastor, Holy Trinity Catholic Church