

Saturday, May 30, 2020

Dear Parishioners:

In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus is asked about which of the 10 Commandments is the greatest. And in His answer, Jesus presents an answer that I have been greatly pondering and praying on as your pastor and shepherd. I'd like to share his words with you right now: "He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.'"

It is this passage from Sacred Scripture that has had me torn these past few days since Bishop George Leo Thomas, has given permission for Catholic parishes throughout the Diocese of Las Vegas to slowly reopen starting next weekend with the Vigil of Holy Trinity following his *Phase II Guidelines*.

Our Bishop, as our shepherd here in southern Nevada, has implemented very strict guidelines to keep all of us safe. These guidelines include limiting the total number of people assembled inside of St. Anthony, including the priest, ushers, musicians, and custodial staff to no more than 50 people. These guidelines include implementing a "reservation"-style system. These guidelines request that we take everyone's temperature as they enter the parish; and to refrain from congregational singing and community interaction. These guidelines recommend that all over 65 take advantage of the Bishop's dispensation, and simply stay home. Thankfully, our Bishop has implemented these guidelines to keep all of us safe.

In his letter, Bishop Thomas does not anticipate Phase II lasting very long because these guidelines are very restrictive, and for good reason. Additionally, Bishop Thomas has given permission for churches to remain closed if the pastor believes that he cannot safely open.

In conversation with Fr. Sabastian, Fr. Sam, and Fr. Joe, I have decided that St. Anthony of Padua will remain closed to the public during Phase II. While it causes me great heartache to share this update with you, and I understand the anguish and pain many of you may feel with my decision, I have to heed the words of Jesus when he tells us to "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Ultimately, as your pastor, I sometimes have to make unpopular decisions. Three of our four priests here at the parish, as well as most of my staff and volunteers, are in the demographic most at-risk with this virus for one reason or another. Secondly, there simply is no fair way to decide who is able to receive the Sacraments, and who is not. With temperatures now north of 100 degrees, I can't have newborns and their moms, the disabled, and the elderly standing on blacktop - spaced six feet apart - in the blazing Sun with the hope of coming inside.



Conversely, while most of our parishioners have now figured out YouTube, an online sign-up surely will confuse many of our less tech-savvy family members - including myself.

During Phase II, we will continue to livestream Mass daily at 5:30 PM followed by some sort of activity, event, or Adoration. During Phase II, we will continue with our 4 PM Saturday Vigil Mass, and our 10 AM and 2 PM Masses on Sunday, live-streaming. This decision is truly painful, and I understand and accept the sadness and anger you might have towards me. This was, and has not been, an easy decision to make.

I thank you for your patience and understanding. We are all looking forward to the day when we will be one again. Let us continue to pray for one another.

Blessings,

Fr. Robert W. Puhlman, M.Div.

Pastor, St. Anthony of Padua Roman Catholic Church