

May 6, 2020

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

Dear Catholic Faithful of Oklahoma,

We have been heartened by the many stories of faithful Catholics witnessing to Jesus' presence through their patience in suffering and in the good they are doing for their neighbors. Thank you! At the same time, we all to some degree are growing weary of isolation, threats to health and economic hardship. During this Easter season, we rely on Our Lord's assurance: "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!"

After the Apostles had experienced the shocking crucifixion of their beloved friend and teacher, everything they thought they knew with certainty was disrupted and they feared what might come next. After the triumph of the Resurrection, they found joy in the faith they shared in the Risen Christ. In their time of fear and uncertainty, Jesus came to them.

After his Ascension into heaven, these still timid disciples gathered to celebrate Pentecost in the same room in Jerusalem in which they had shared the Last Supper and first Eucharist. They had shared in his suffering and now they shared the hope of the glory of the risen Christ. Jesus had promised that the Father would pour out his own Spirit upon them to guide, direct and protect them through all trials and tribulations.

The gift of the Holy Spirit assures us of God's continued presence in our lives. No matter the circumstance, he is with us. Perhaps the greatest sacrifice for the lay faithful these past few months has been fasting from Christ's body, blood, soul and divinity given to us in his real presence in the Eucharist. We pray that in this time of Eucharistic fasting, God has graced you with a profound hunger for this communion with Jesus and the members of his Body, the Church.

To remind us of God's faithfulness and to prepare to celebrate the birth of our beloved Church on Pentecost, we have determined to resume the celebration of public Mass in Oklahoma during the week of May 18 with Sunday Mass resuming May 23-24.

Because of the unprecedented nature of these challenges, we will proceed with caution. The dispensation for attending Mass and the practice of live-streaming Mass will remain in place for anyone who wishes to wait longer before returning to public worship. We are dealing with an invisible threat to people's lives, a virus that our brightest doctors and scientists are still figuring out. The ever-present temptation in our American culture is to want solutions immediately and to act quickly, because we want what we want, and we want it now. As a Church, we must proceed more deliberately.

Based upon guidance from civic leaders and public health authorities as well as in consultation with local medical professionals, a taskforce comprised of priests and laity, and the Presbyteral Councils of both dioceses, we are issuing the “Timeline and Procedures for Resumption of Public Mass and Sacramental Life,” which will be in effect in both the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma until further notice.

The procedures and timeline provide general precautions such as limiting the number of parishioners at each Mass and guidelines for the distribution of communion while providing flexibility for every parish and priest to determine what works best for their community.

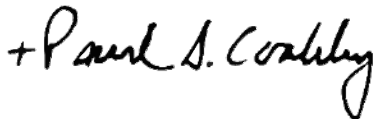
We will continue to monitor the health crisis and adjust implementation of the procedures accordingly. Frequent handwashing and social distancing remain vital precautions to slow the spread of this disease. Additionally, our pastors will learn from you and from each other as these guidelines are implemented, adjusting procedures according to what they learn. Just as the laity have sacrificed with their Eucharistic fast, the priests have sacrificed by their inability to provide the faithful with this heavenly banquet and celebrate the sacraments with them. They long to see the faces of their parishioners once again.

We encourage the faithful to pray the Novena to the Holy Spirit in preparation for Pentecost with the particular intention of asking the Holy Spirit to guide, direct and protect the Church in Oklahoma in the midst of these perilous times as we begin to publicly celebrate Mass again.

Whether separated by a virus or gathered in community, we remain brothers and sisters in Christ.

In darkness, he dawns. Come, Holy Spirit!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul S. Coakley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Most Rev. David Konderla". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Most Reverend David A. Konderla
Bishop of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma