

Dear Parishioners,

St. Michael's School has begun! Our students began arriving last Monday and now have the first week under their belts. As I mentioned last week, the school will look very different from past years. Parents will need to take their child's temperature **before** sending them off to school and if they have a fever, they will need to stay home. It is better to keep them home for a few days than to risk having them and their classmates in quarantine for two weeks. The use of masks and social distancing will also be practiced inside the classroom and out. And we will be cleaning the classrooms every four hours. Everyone will have to do their part to keep the school community healthy. I encourage you to pray for our school, our staff, students and parents. I also encourage you to send a note to our staff thanking them for their commitment and service to our parish families and our parish community.

As I continue to reflect upon this pandemic and what we have learned, I think of our long absence from the Mass! I doubt if we can fully appreciate the Mass until it's taken away from us. Perhaps, we didn't think much about going to Mass previously- it was something that was ingrained into our heads from our youth. However, since those early days of our youth, something was building within us. There were times when we seemed to get nothing out of the Mass or we rebelled about being forced to go by our parents, but all the while, something was growing.

A few months ago, I saved various fruit seeds and decided to plant them. I had apple seeds, orange seeds, cherry pits, placed them in a planter and water them once in a while. I had almost given up on them because I had not seen any sign of life, then without warning several spouts of new life began to appear. I was thrilled to see them since I was about to dump them and start all over again. I have no idea what's growing in the planter- if it's a sapling which may grow into a tree or a weed, but it is a sign of life.

I think this is similar to our faith. We don't always know the impact that the Mass has upon us, but something has been and continues to grow within us- that something is a budding relationship with Jesus. It is at the Mass that we are able to hear and respond to the Word of God and the Bread of Life. That brief time spent at Mass was not wasted time. Jesus was growing within us and shaping us more and more into His likeness. How was this happening, why couldn't we recognize this growth? That is part of the mystery of entering into the life of Jesus. After a long absence from the Mass we begin to realize how much we missed Jesus. Perhaps only now are we realizing the importance of this relationship. We may not be able to express why we missed the Mass, only that we do. We are still processing the importance of the Mass in our minds and hearts and in the meantime, feel that this is where we need to be.

I am very much aware that there are parishioners who are not ready to come back to the Mass. Perhaps they are afraid of the crowds or find wearing a mask a difficulty. We need to share our experience with them, if possible, and continue to invite them to return- **but at their own comfort level**. I don't want any parishioner to feel coerced into coming back. It is a choice that is up to them, but we may be able to alleviate their fears about returning. I have to say there are more parishioners returning to the Mass each week, whether it is for the weekend Mass or the week day Mass.

Next week, we will be blessing and distributing palms after each Mass. Since we were unable to gather for Palm Sunday, the palms have been resting in the cooler of the cafeteria, waiting to be given away. The Blessing will be low keyed and everyone is invited to take them home or to our loved ones as a sign of our welcoming Christ into our homes. Stay healthy and have a blessed week... Fr. Tom