Holy Spirit Catholic Community’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

March 18, 2020

Life is sacred, and we should not put ourselves in unnecessary danger in the face of the current pandemic any more than we would step in front of a moving train. Therefore, Holy Spirit Catholic Community will not gather at the Chapel for Mass until further notice.

That does not mean that we can’t share Eucharist. We can temporarily adopt the practice of the early Christian communities and continue to pray and celebrate together, albeit at a distance.

Followers of the way of Jesus in the early church gathered weekly for a common meal, which they shared in their homes, called “house churches.” Each meal would include a blessing prayer, the breaking of bread, and the sharing of bread and wine, remembering Jesus. Over time this Communion (a Greek word for “fellowship”) came to be called Eucharist (another Greek word, meaning “thanksgiving”), and it became the focus of the weekly celebration.

They didn’t have priests. Prayer in those house churches was led by the people—men and women—who lived in the house. As Paul traveled around converting and baptizing Christians, he didn’t hang around and say Mass for them, and he didn’t ordain anyone. The custom of ordaining priests didn’t even start until the second century. Ordinary people led the Mass, and Paul traveled on. A house church got together to share bread and wine, read the scriptures, pray, and help the needy.

All are welcome to join Holy Spirit Catholic Community in following this practice of our ancestors in faith. We’ll be praying the Mass at our kitchen tables at 4:30 on Saturday and 5:30 on Sunday, joined in prayer with those of you who are doing the same, whether it’s at those times or other times. While we can’t get together physically, we can gather in spirit.

So please set out some bread or crackers or cookies and some wine or grape juice or some other drink, sit at your home table in your home church, alone or with your family, and say Mass with me. We will be, as Villanova’s Professor Massimo Faggioli put it, “an icon of the moments of stark loneliness of the believer in the secular world, but always in the company of the faith and of other faithful, sparsely but ever present, somewhere congregated.”
You are in our prayers. Please keep us in yours. And may God bless you and keep you,

For the Community
Rev. Bev Bingle

P.S. In addition to historical practice, here’s some theological support for getting together in the Spirit, from Daniel P. Horan, Franciscan friar and assistant professor of systematic theology and spirituality at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, in *Communion of saints, an important tenet of our faith, can help during coronavirus times*:

Theologian and St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, professor emerita at Fordham University, stated at the outset of her 1998 book, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*, that misconceptions about the doctrine are so prevalent that any effort to talk constructively about the communion of saints requires first identifying what this belief "is not." She explains:

This doctrinal symbol does not in the first instance refer to paradigmatic figures, those outstanding individuals traditionally called "saints," but rather names the whole community of people graced by the Spirit of God. Neither does it point exclusively to those who have died; rather, the community of living persons is its primary referent. Furthermore, while obviously interested in human beings, the symbol does not allude to them exclusively but embraces the whole natural world in a "communion of the holy."

At its core, the communion of saints is an affirmation of the empowering, unifying, and healing work of the Holy Spirit among all God's people and creation.

The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, beautifully and succinctly describes the reality of the communion of saints, noting that, "all the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit."

P.P.S. If you would like to receive each week’s Mass text and homily in order to celebrate with us, please send your e-address to urbanhermit@catholicweb.com. Thanks!