

Reflection from Most Reverend Donald Bolen, Archbishop of Regina

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ of the Archdiocese of Regina,

Warm greetings on this feast of St Catherine of Siena.

As you know, last week, the Saskatchewan government announced plans for the gradual lifting of some of the restrictions currently in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic, in a way that maintains the health and keeps active cases low.

While this plan includes the reopening of some businesses and outdoor activities over the next several weeks, no mention of faith communities was made. There is need for us to dialogue with the government for direction on how these reopening plans might affect our ability to worship. At the same time, it is clear that it will be some time before current restrictions on large group gatherings and strict physical distancing policies would be lifted in ways that would allow us to resume parish life as we know it.

This is not easy news for us to hear as we experience a growing, collective hunger for the Eucharist. Many parishioners and clergy have expressed frustration at the restrictions currently in place in our parishes, and are pushing for those to be eased. The decisions currently in place were discerned in conversation with health officials, with our Archdiocesan operations committee, and with the Council of Priests. We will continue to monitor the situation and revisit decisions every couple of weeks.

As you know, health and government officials have forbade gatherings of over ten people. That would give us quite a bit of leeway for weekday Masses. But they have also requested that we encourage people to stay at home, to minimize interactions which could lead to the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, and to do everything we can to protect vulnerable sectors of our society, which includes many of our parishioners. The way we celebrate the Eucharist and receive communion in our churches is conducive to the spread of the virus, and our yearning to provide the Eucharist clashes with a profound desire not to put people at risk.

If we resume celebrations to the maximum extent possible and the virus spreads through just one of the 100 or so parishes that could be providing the Eucharist at this time, and people die as a result, that would be a tragedy and a heavy burden for all of us to bear. There are no easy answers; every option has positives and negatives to consider. Making decisions in this regard is tremendously difficult, with huge values on either side and with partial information about the virus itself.

There will be a time when we will return to gathered Masses and we will do so with the confidence that we have contributed to the good of all society by our sacrifices, and with great joy. When we discern that we can take a couple of very cautious steps forward, we will do so. Meanwhile we ask your patience and your prayers.

The first years of St. Catherine of Siena's life were lived during the Black Plague, which killed somewhere between 75 and 100 million people. Her life speaks to our situation. She lived most of her adult life hungry, subsisting on little more than the Eucharist for long stretches. That might look like the opposite of our current situation, when many of us have enough to eat, but are increasingly hungry for the Eucharist. But in our current situation, which can be seen as a Eucharistic fast, St Catherine can teach us through her relying completely on God to meet her needs. Our spiritual hunger for the Eucharist carries with it the same message. God alone can satisfy us. And, our Catholic tradition insists, God can do so even when the Eucharist is not available to us. Let us use this time of fasting to increase our hunger for God and to learn to recognize how God alone satisfies our deepest needs.

Undeniably, this time is challenging for all involved. Those who hunger most now for the Body of Christ - found in the Eucharist and communities from which they are separated - will be satisfied. Along with St Catherine of Siena, our faith also proclaims the holiness of many who never received the Eucharist - think of Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Esther, and St Joseph. If God can make great saints of these men and women without the Eucharist, imagine how much more He will do with those who hunger for it now and will return to it with a greater appreciation and deeper devotion.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, the Lord never abandons us. He is giving us the grace to live this time, in solidarity with Christians the world over, with courage, endurance, and prayer. We are now, right now, as always, being invited to receive the Lord into our lives, in many ways. I encourage you to welcome the Risen Lord with all your hearts. God bless you all.

Most Rev. Donald Bolen
Archbishop of Regina

Link to Archbishop Bolen's message: <https://youtu.be/C4kBYrC2V1g>