

A Message from Father Brian ~

Happy Pentecost, everyone!

With this weekend's solemn feast, we commemorate one of the pivotal moments in salvation history: the coming of the Holy Spirit in power upon the apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary, gathered in prayer in the Upper Room. As described in our first reading from Acts, it is a moment of high drama, with the house shaking and tongues of fire alighting on those huddled together in that sacred place. With Pentecost, the risen Jesus fulfills the promise he had made to his friends in the days before his Ascension, namely, that he would not leave them orphaned, but would send the Spirit to be their Advocate and Guide. The descent of the Spirit refashions the hearts and minds of the disciples, banishing their lingering confusion and fear, and emboldening them for the mission their Master had entrusted to them: to proclaim a Gospel of repentance and new life to the ends of the world.

It's hard to believe, but it's been **two years** since we celebrated today's feast with a colorful Appreciation Party for all our ministers and volunteers in the school gym. During these long months of the COVID pandemic, time sometimes races by, and sometimes crawls at a snail's pace. For me, recalling that particular celebration brings both happy memories and a touch of sadness. We've had so little opportunity to enjoy each other's company as a parish family since we first learned what the coronavirus was.

Perhaps I'm sounding too downbeat, given the *very encouraging news* we've been hearing over the last week or so, and the steps being taken by the CDC, New York State, and other agencies in moving to return our lives to something approaching what we knew before. I can't imagine that any of you are unaware of the dramatic changes in policy that have just recently been announced. Our Diocese has also been working to reconfigure the many protocols that have been in place since March, 2020. As we announced at the Masses last weekend, the parish staff and I are looking at these

recommendations thoughtfully. There's a lot to go through, particularly in trying to synthesize what the Diocese is saying with what we're hearing from the CDC and NYS. But within a few weeks (maybe less) we will have arrived at a set of interim guidelines to help parish life move forward. This is a hopeful time! But it's also one in which charity demands **we not set aside our concern** for those who are vulnerable, particularly the elderly, sick, or otherwise compromised. A number of parishioners have remarked to me that the reason they feel comfortable joining us for Mass in person at St. Lawrence is precisely because they believe they're in a safe environment. I don't intend to undo that hard-won sense of safety, even as we lift many of the past year's restrictions.

Very much in that vein: one of the biggest news stories of the past month or two—and even more so over the last week—is **the ongoing debate about the necessity of wearing masks**. Paying close attention to what I hear—not only from the CDC or our Governor, but from our parishioners and staff—I am *strongly recommending* that for the time being, those entering the church or other parish buildings continue to wear a mask or cloth facial covering for the brief time you are with us. An epidemiologist might have a different point of view. But I think it would be a mistake for us to set the masks aside too abruptly, when we are gathering in sizable numbers in a large but enclosed space; when we ourselves will be relaxing social distancing; and when many are not yet fully vaccinated.

We continue to have a responsibility to and for our neighbor, even if we stand on different sides of this surprisingly contentious issue. **Let us love one another**—even if it means a measure of inconvenience or sacrifice for now.

May our patron and brother, St. Lawrence, pray for us! God love you.