

May 21, 2020

Dear Monsignor or Father or Deacon:

A blessed Feast of the Ascension to you! After having consulted with the Presbyteral Council yesterday morning, Bishop Persico has issued the attached decree promulgating the protocols for the resumption of public Masses.

As you will note, the Bishop is calling for a gradual return to public Masses. Parishes will resume public Masses only when the pastor determines that his parish(es) can meet all of the protocols. The earliest permitted date for resuming public Masses is Monday, June 1. Some parishes will be ready on that day, but others may take considerably more time. No parish should begin before the pastor determines that the parish is ready to meet the protocols. **Very importantly, the Bishop will support a pastor who determines that the parish needs to delay resuming public Masses, whether due to practical concerns or even to personal concerns.** The Bishop will inform the faithful of that fact at this evening's town hall meeting.

The Presbyteral Council discussed the need for pastors to communicate with parishioners about the expectations expressed in the protocols. Numerous details will need to be worked out locally, everything from who will wipe down the pews to where the cleaning supplies will come from. The pastor also needs to consider his own health situation. As much flexibility is written into the protocols as possible. A greater attention to detail early in the planning stage and clear communication with the parishioners will make implementation flow more smoothly. The attached decree can be posted to your parish websites. It can also be copied and sent to parishioners together with a letter from the pastor. In particular, pastors are encouraged to keep parishioners informed about the readiness of the parish or, conversely, what still needs to be done in order to get the parish ready and an estimate of when the parish might be able to resume public Masses.

At the Bishop's town hall meeting this evening at 7:00 p.m., he will talk about these protocols and emphasize the need of parishioners to follow them, as well as give his explanation of the reasoning behind some of them. You may find it particularly helpful to watch the town hall meeting to get better insight into the Bishop's thinking behind these protocols. If you are unable to watch it live, it will be available after-the-fact beginning Friday at www.ErieRDC.org.

One final note: Saint Mark Catholic Center will reopen for business at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, March 26. The diocesan offices are closed - even remotely - until then in observance of Ascension Thursday and the Memorial Day weekend.

In these strange times, as we continue venturing into uncharted waters, be assured of my prayers. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,
Msgr. Edward M. Lohse
Vicar General