

Message for May 8-9, 2021

I have two pieces of good news to share with you today. First, it looks like we have made enough progress against COVID-19 to allow us to now make mask wearing optional during Mass in our Churches, effective next weekend, May 15-16—optional, but still recommended, especially for those who are not yet fully vaccinated or are otherwise especially vulnerable to this virus. This one week delay is to give vaccine-hesitant people one more week to at least get their first shot, which I strongly encourage, for one's own good and the good of others. Though we are setting aside the mask mandate during Mass for now, please pray that the incidence of the coronavirus will continue to diminish and no new return to mask wearing be required. In a similar vein, reception of Communion on the tongue can now resume during Mass. This loosening of our protocols does not change the mask wearing and physical distancing requirements in our schools, hospitals and other places which establish their own policies. Moreover, local pastors can designate Masses or other times and places where mask wearing continues to be required.

The other piece of good news is that at 10:00 am on May 29 we will ordain 5 young men to the priesthood and we will be doing so at the Barton Coliseum located at the fairgrounds on Roosevelt Avenue in Little Rock. We reserved the Coliseum because at the time the requirements of physical distancing would have prevented most people from attending if the ordination were to take place in one of our Churches, but with the Coliseum we have a venue for these ordinations that seats about 10,000 people! But look how the Lord provides for us! All indications are that the worst of the pandemic is now behind us and these ordinations provide us with a golden opportunity to gather as a diocese—with plenty of room to spread out—to thank the Lord for his many blessings, for guiding us through this pandemic, to pray for those who have died and to rejoice in finally being able to once again look to the future with these ordinations and with our step by step, gradual return to normal parish life.

For that reason, I would like to invite you to come to this great event in the life of our diocese. I'll bet most of you have never been to a priesthood ordination! And what a joy it will be to do so after this dark year of so many restrictions. I hope all youth groups will come and all who participate in College Campus Ministry; all Knights of Columbus and Knights and Ladies of Peter Claver and Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulcher; all of our Serra Club members and all of our Charismatic prayer groups, all of our priests and deacons and religious and seminarians, all of our Catholic Daughters and Legion of Mary, all Pax Christi members and participants in the St. Andrew School of Evangelization and Fuerza Transformadora. You get the picture: everyone is invited! There is plenty of parking and plenty of room for everyone!

Alex Smith from St. Jude in Jacksonville will be ordained, his first assignment will be St. Joseph in Fayetteville and Sts. Peter and Paul in Lincoln. Omar Galván from Immaculate Conception in Fort Smith will be ordained, his first assignment will be St. Raphael in Springdale and St. Joseph in Tontitown. Ben Riley from Christ the King in Little Rock will be ordained, his first assignment will be at Immaculate Conception in North Little Rock. Emmanuel Torres from St. Edward in Little Rock will be ordained, his first assignment will be Immaculate Heart of Mary in Marché and St. Mary in North Little Rock. Brian Cundall from Christ the King in Little Rock will be ordained, his first assignment will be to St. Joseph in Conway and St. Oscar Romero in Greenbrier. Two others who will have just been ordained to the transitional diaconate will be serving at this Mass: Jaime Nieto from St. Raphael in Springdale who will spend his deacon summer at Sacred Heart in Morrilton and St. Joseph in Center Ridge, and Daniel Wendel from Christ the King in Little Rock, who will spend his deacon summer at Immaculate Conception in Fort Smith. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have an especially great turnout from the parishes from which these vocations have emerged and from the parishes who will first receive the ministry of these young men? So please, mark your calendars and join us at the Barton Coliseum at 10:00 am, Saturday May 29! And as for this weekend, Happy Mother's Day!