

*From Fr. Joe's Desk...*

***Mass: Christmas 2020:  
Reservations About,  
Reservations For***

As I write this, we are about two and a half weeks away from Christmas. We have yet to see the post-Thanksgiving Day Corona-Virus consequences and can only plan with a great deal of uncertainty for the Christmas holiday to come. The uncertainty catches us between two ends of a continuum. On one end, we long to celebrate according to the customs and traditions that we have embraced as families and church over the past many years. On the other end, we are apprehensive about the effect that any liturgical celebration of Christmas may have upon us, upon the lives of our loved ones, and upon the lives of the wider community. Safe to say, we have reservations *about* Christmas.

Faced with the horns of this dilemma, like many other Catholic parishes, we have wrestled with how to pray well and to pray safely at Christmas. The cautions that have informed our practice in these past several months remain pertinent. Those who have been exposed to the Corona Virus near to the holiday should remain at home. Those who are in high risk categories, e.g., those over the age of sixty, those with pre-existing health conditions that put them at risk, they should also stay at home. To abide by these guidelines will certainly make Christmas feel different, but it would be a Christmas gift to everyone else in the community, as well as to yourselves.

But this leaves a large percentage of our population with decisions to make. How will Mass, if at all, be part of our Christmas celebration? In addition, how do we account for the large numbers of people who only worship at Christmas and Easter and who are not part of our customary communication channels about church activities. Unquestionably, for example, the 4pm Christmas Vigil Mass has been our largest assembly of the year – standing room only, people arriving an hour ahead of time to claim a seat. How do we plan to pray well and to pray safe? Obviously, we cannot simply adopt a business-as-usual approach to Christmas Mass. So as of this writing, this is our plan. (Much can happen in the time between now and Christmas, so this could change.)

In order to address our concerns *about* Mass at Christmas, we will be requiring reservations *for* Mass at Christmas. Please read what follows closely, for it will challenge you to think in different ways than you have approached Christmas in the past.

First of all, our Christmas Mass schedule will be pared down from the past. There will be no Midnight Mass this Christmas. We will have Mass on Christmas Eve at 4pm and 7pm, and at 10am on Christmas morning. But – here's the significant difference – all of these Mass-

es will be *by reservation only*. And the reservations will be on a first-come, first-serve basis **beginning December 8th**. Here is how this will (I hope) happen.

We will be using an on-line reservation tool to help us make this happen. If you would like to participate in-person in liturgy on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, go to the parish website ([www.olleuclid.org](http://www.olleuclid.org)) or any of our social media sites, follow this link, <https://parishreservations.com/ladylakeoh> and follow the prompts it provides. It is very user friendly. It is important that you notice some of the following:

There is a limit to those who can make reservations for any given Mass. This means that not everyone who wants to make a reservation may get his or her request satisfied. The limit for any given Mass, initially, will be based upon the premise that the attender is coming alone. That would mean the maximum number of attendees in our space would be 102. However, we realize that at Christmas, many come as couples or families. Since people *living in the same households* can sit together, if we know in advance how many in a given household would like to come, we may be able to increase our capacity at a given liturgy and still meet social distancing requirements. We have the ability to increase the limit for any given Mass as the reservations come in, depending upon what shape they take. All this having been said, the number of people at any given liturgy will be significantly smaller than at any Christmas past.

Another wrinkle is that in order to accommodate safely the largest number of parishioners, seats will be assigned. In all probability, you will not be able to sit in your "favorite" or over time, your "own" spot. From my point of view, this is a small sacrifice for the benefit of the larger parish.

For those who do not have on-line access to make reservations, you can call the rectory to do so. But please note, in order that the first-come, first-serve policy for reservations be fair and effective, these calls must be placed during normal business hours. Those who take the calls will immediately enter them into the on-line instrument so that no one who calls during these times will be at a disadvantage relative to those who make reservations on-line.

Right now, the plan is for someone to meet you at the door and escort you to your pre-assigned seat. You may want to bring your on-line receipt with you to church.

Please remember that the dispensation from having to attend Mass at Christmas remains in effect. In other words, attendance at Mass at Christmas is not an obligation. There are many compelling and reasonable motivation to remain at home this year. Also, please note that at least one of our Christmas Masses will be live streamed for those who want to pray with us at home. But if you would like to participate in person, what I have described above is, as of now, what you can expect. I thank you in advance for your understanding and cooperation.