



December 6, 2018

Dear Parishioners,

The season of Advent is a new beginning, as the liturgical year has us begin again the cycle of salvation history. The opportunity of the newly renovated sanctuary is also presented to us as a renewal of our commitment to the sacred space and, more importantly, the sacred actions that take place during our liturgies. I would like to take this opportunity, as we move into the newly renovated sanctuary, to make certain adjustments to our liturgical practice. As you know, we have tried here at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul to be faithful to both the letter and the spirit of the liturgical rubrics, interpreting them in particular, in light of the traditional practices handed down to us by our ancestors in the faith. However, there are certain modern accommodations that people have become accustomed to in many places, and to choose the more traditional practices in every instance may lead to confusion among some of the faithful. In seeking and heeding the counsel of Bishop Stika, I would like to present the following as an explanation and catechesis on the liturgical practice here at Saints Peter and Paul.

As a basilica, we enjoy certain privileges, but also have duties towards our celebration of the sacred liturgy. As directed in *Domus Ecclesiae: Norms for the Granting of the Title of Minor Basilica*, §I.1:

“A CHURCH FOR WHICH THE TITLE OF BASILICA IS PROPOSED MUST HAVE BEEN DEDICATED TO GOD BY A LITURGICAL RITE AND MUST STAND OUT AS A CENTER OF ACTIVE AND PASTORAL LITURGY, ESPECIALLY THROUGH CELEBRATIONS OF THE MOST HOLY EUCHARIST, OF PENANCE, AND OF THE OTHER SACRAMENTS, WHICH CELEBRATIONS SET AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR PREPARATION AND REALIZATION ACCORDING TO LITURGICAL NORMS AND WITH THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.”

You will notice that we have recently made a delineation in the gradation of solemnity of our weekend liturgies, as noted on our bulletin, entrance signs, and website. Briefly presented, it means that the 5:30 pm Vigil on Saturday and the 9 am Mass on Sunday are Masses celebrated in the *Novus Ordo*, or “New Order” of Mass (*Missale Romanum* 2000), with what has become the custom of Mass celebrated towards the people, with a minimal use of the Latin language, and a rare use of incense. However, the 11:30 Mass has been set aside as the principal Mass of the parish, and so receives the highest amount of liturgical expression. In practical terms, this means we exercise the traditional orientation of prayer where the priest and people face together, and the Holy Sacrifice is offered *ad orientem*. Furthermore, we sing everything listed in the Missal to be sung. We freely draw from the wellspring of the Church’s sacred music tradition, singing Gregorian chant and polyphony. Latin being the common heritage and patrimony of Western civilization, we utilize the Latin language, in particular because it unifies us with our tradition from time immemorial as well as our contemporaries in the Hispanic community, who do not speak the English language. Lastly, our ample use of incense at this Mass more than makes up for its not being used at the other two English Masses. The Spanish Mass finds its balance seasonally in that we incorporate these traditional practices during the high seasons and omit them the majority of the year. The people of the Hispanic community have responded very positively to this. We also offer the more ancient form of the Roman rite on the fourth Sunday of every month. It is what is called the *Missa Cantata* – the sung Mass. This form of the Mass contains all of the elements that we find at the 11:30 Mass and is the source of our inspiration for the interpretation and guidance for all of our Masses celebrated according to the new order (*Novus Ordo*). It is my hope that with an awareness of these different expressions of our liturgy, people will feel free to choose which best exemplifies for them the worship that they are called to every Sunday and accommodates their needs, especially for those who are allergic to incense or desire a quieter Sunday celebration.

Since the cold and flu season of this past year, we enacted the precautions that Bishop Stika instructed us to do, namely, to omit the sign of peace and to refrain from the use of the Precious Blood in Holy Communion. We have

continued both of these practices, especially in our temporary exile in Varallo Parish Hall, partly due to logistical and space considerations. We have made an effort to catechize the faithful on these matters through preaching, pastor's notes, and announcements before Mass. It should be noted that we have always offered at least one chalice at every Mass, with the express purpose and announcement that people suffering from Celiac disease or other severe gluten allergies might avail themselves of the Blessed Sacrament.

We also did not merely omit the practice of the sign of peace. Rather, we implemented a more amplified sign of peace at the beginning of Mass that is actually extended for a few moments. This was an effort to follow the directives approved by Pope Francis June 8, 2014, in which the misuse and abuses of the sign of peace were addressed, and which specifically gave a provision that, "if it is foreseen that it will not take place properly... it can be omitted, and sometimes ought to be omitted." We ask the people to stand and turn to one another and introduce themselves, something that would not be appropriate to do during Mass, nor did it seem appropriate to needlessly repeat the gesture during Mass. This practice of greeting one another before Mass was an initiative that came to me from the Parish Pastoral Council and one that I heartily welcomed and implemented. The vast majority of people have very much appreciated the way this is done, as it gives more time for the greeting and getting to know one another, without interrupting the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. However, some expressed concern to the Bishop that the Basilica does not do the sign of peace at Mass or Communion under both species. I am sure that there are a few people who misunderstood what was happening or who were not the recipients of our ample catechesis. Many more people tell me that they prefer the way we are doing things. However, following the Bishop's guidance, I am making preparations for us to resume these practices at our Sunday Masses when we go up into the newly renovated sanctuary.

The Precious Blood will be offered on either side of the sanctuary, as before, with the noted addition of the option to kneel on the altar rail, if the recipient so desires. More to come on the use of the altar rail in the future. Also, we will continue to invite people to greet one another before Mass begins, as this has been a very positive addition that has made our parish a more welcoming and friendlier community. However, when the deacon invites the faithful during Mass to offer one another the Sign of Peace, we will follow the rubrics laid out in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, §82, which says,

"IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT EACH PERSON, IN A SOBER MANNER, OFFERS THE SIGN OF PEACE ONLY TO THOSE WHO ARE NEAREST."

The theory behind this is that this is a symbolic gesture that is meant to characterize the charity of Christ, but is not meant to distract us from the Holy Sacrifice and the Holy Communion we are about to receive. This is not the time for greeting or socializing, but rather recognizing that we are part of the Body of Christ, which we are about to receive.

"IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND THAT NOTHING IS LOST WHEN THE SIGN OF PEACE IS MARKED BY A SOBRIETY WHICH PRESERVES THE PROPER SPIRIT OF THE CELEBRATION, AS, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN IT IS RESTRICTED TO ONE'S IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURS."

– Pope Benedict XVI, *Esort. Apost., Sacramentum caritatis*, Feb. 22, 2007, n. 49: AAS 99 (2007) 143.

It is my hope that these changes to our liturgical practice can be incorporated with a spirit of devotion and reverence and that this might lead us to a greater appreciation of what Christ has done for us in the Paschal Mystery, which is made present and manifest to us every time we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Sincerely in Christ Jesus,



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Rev. J. David Carter, JCL  
Pastor and Rector