



May 3, 2022

Dear parishioners,

It was wonderful! It was wonderful to see so many people at Masses for Easter. Including the Easter Vigil Saturday night, we had four Masses with **388** people attending. To put that in perspective, last year we had 301 people, an increase of 25%. It filled my heart with joy to see so many people at Mass. On Easter we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Does the increase in attendance show a resurrection in the life of our parish? I hope so. ***I pray for this.***

Of course, we are in a better place with the COVID pandemic. We no longer have to practice complete social distancing and the number of serious cases, with many people vaccinated, are presently ***much*** lower than even just two months ago. For this we are thankful. In church, we are grateful for the return of some normalcy as we are using our hymnals and are beginning to look at resuming the ministry of Altar Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

As the grass turns green and the spring plants begin to blossom, as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, we give thanks to God to see so many people at Mass for Easter. If you are one of those who are just returning to Mass since COVID began, please know that we are grateful that you joined us once again. Of course, we are also grateful for those who have been coming throughout the pandemic. Without you, the last two years would have been even more difficult.

Of course, the reality is that the number of people attending Mass was down from years past before the COVID pandemic ever started. The pandemic just accelerated the decline. I write today about what we might do to change this.

Perhaps you are one of the people who continued to attend Mass throughout the pandemic (except when we were shutdown). ***We are grateful for your faith and perseverance.*** For you, I invite you to use what follows to pray for those who haven't been coming to church and how you might encourage those around you who don't come to church to come.

Maybe you are one of the people just returning to church. ***We are very grateful that you are back now.*** I invite you to read this letter to think about how to renew and grow in your faith.

Maybe you are someone who hasn't been to church in a long time. I invite you to read this letter to know how much we miss you and what our faith offers.

Maybe you are someone who would like to come but are homebound. ***Please be assured of our prayers.*** We continue to offer a recording of our Sunday Masses on our website (www.stmarystben.org) by Sunday evening and are evaluating the possibility of livestreaming the 10:00 am Mass.

Our concern is not for the sake of numbers. Our concern, ***my deep concern***, is for the salvation of souls. Attendance is an indication of how we are doing at leading people to Christ. Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. *She exists in order to evangelize*, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection." (14).

So, besides COVID, why don't people come to church? There are a variety of answers. Some have lost their faith. Some have even become atheists, denying that God exists while others have become agnostic, doubting God exists but not denying it. Others have stopped coming because of real concerns about how past sexual abuse was poorly handled in the church. There is no excuse for this. ***It is not enough*** but please allow me to say ***I am sorry*** for any abuse that happened. I invite everyone to pray for the victims and for those whose trust in the church was broken. I also ask that you pray that all involved in leading our church listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Others stopped coming to church because they feel like they didn't get much out of it. Here, we need to help people understand ***why*** we do what we do at Mass. When we come to Mass, we know there are times when we sit, kneel, and stand but do you know why? There are times when we are silent and there are times when we speak in unison. Do you know why? "Why?" is a very important question. When we understand why, it helps us move from superficial exterior actions to expressing what is in our hearts. If you feel like you don't get much out of Mass or just want to learn more, I invite you to watch some videos on my website about what goes on at Mass listed in the resource list at the end on this letter.

Another reason that people have stopped coming is a loss of belief that the bread and wine are truly transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Jesus. I know "transubstantiation" is one of those big church words but I believe it is an important word. In very simple terms, it means the bread and wine are "changed" into the Body and Blood of Christ. There is nothing like this on earth so it deserves a special word. ***It is Jesus!*** (The resource list at the end of this letter includes a video on the Eucharist.)

It is our belief in the Real Presence that makes it worth coming to Mass weekly. When we believe it is Jesus, then we want to receive. We make the effort to come. Some people may choose to come once in a while, thinking it is enough or when they feel they need some help. I know there are many demands on our time but, I truly believe, we gain when we come to Mass every week. It remains a precept (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2042) of the Church that we keep the Sabbath holy by coming to church every Sunday, making exceptions only for illnesses or terrible weather conditions.

In my video on the Eucharist, I briefly mention “Ocular Communion.” This is Eucharistic Adoration. In Eucharistic Adoration, Jesus, in the consecrated host, is brought out from the Tabernacle and placed in the monstrance on the altar. Anyone can come in and pray before the Blessed Sacrament. One may choose to pray the rosary, any other devotion, read scripture or other spiritual reading, or simply sit quietly in the presence of the Lord. If you find Eucharistic Adoration a struggle, I invite you to read a blog article included in the resource about my own struggle here. Please note that we offer Eucharistic Adoration on the First Friday of each month, normally from 8:30 am to 8:00 pm.

One can pray anywhere but sometimes our homes are too distracting. Praying in church can be less distracting. St. Mary’s of the Lake is open for prayer (unless there is a funeral or wedding) Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm and on the weekend till 4:00 pm.

There are various reasons why one might not be able to receive Communion in a Catholic Church. Even when one is not able to receive Communion, one *can still come to Mass*. If one is not Catholic, one is not to receive. However, we want everyone to be able to. If you know someone who is interested in becoming Catholic and in receiving the Eucharist, I invite them to call Rosemary Nabogis at our parish office.

There are those who might be married outside the church. If you, or someone you know, is interested in having their marriage recognized in the church, I invite you/them to contact me. I want to help you/them.

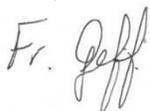
Of course, we should also understand that if we have committed mortal sin, we need to be forgiven of our sins before receiving Communion. We do this in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We have scheduled times for confessions as follows:

- Saturdays from 3:30 to 4:30 pm on Saturdays at St. Benedict’s
- On the Thursday before the First Friday of each month after the 8:00 am Mass at St. Mary’s
- On the third Wednesday of each month from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at St. Mary’s
- Or you can call for an appointment.

If you haven’t been to confession in a while and are not sure where to begin, please see the resource list included at the end of this letter.

Lastly, I end this letter by asking for your prayers. Please pray for those whose faith isn’t as strong as it should be. Pray for those who do not know anything about our faith. Pray for our parish and yourself, that we all may do what Jesus asks of us to share the gospel.

Peace,



Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunncliff
Parochial Administrator

St. Mary's of the Lake/St. Benedict's Resources From Fr. Jeff

On the Mass

You can find videos about the Mass by Fr. Jeff on his website at www.renewaloffaith.org/massvideos. There you will find four short videos that range from five to twenty minutes. If you would like to know more, I invite you to watch the three videos (each about an hour in length) in my series, *Uncovering the Treasures of the Mass* that you can find in the same link.

The Eucharist as Sacrament and Real Presence

For more on the Eucharist, please see Fr. Jeff's video presentation on the Eucharist that was part III of a series he did on the Sacraments. You can find this video at www.renewaloffaith.org/sacramentseucharist. This is a two-hour video. There is so much to say. I pray that people will watch it.

What to Do at Eucharistic Adoration

Here is the text of a homily by Fr. Jeff where he says his own struggle with finding benefit in Eucharistic Adoration - <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=2267>)

Confessing Our Sins, How and Why

If you haven't been to confession in a while and are not sure where to begin, please see Fr. Jeff's videos and handouts on his website at www.renewaloffaith.org/reconciliation.html (The handouts are available in church).

General Link to Fr. Jeff's Website and Blog

- Website (containing articles and videos) - www.renewaloffaith.org
- Blog (homilies and reflective articles) - <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog>

General Resources

You might also check out the videos available from Formed.org through the link on our parish website.

You can also watch the bulletin for information about presentations by our Pastoral Minister, Rosemary Nabogis, or Fr. Jeff

Faith Formation for Children and Youth

We remain committed to not only the education of our adults but also our children and youth. If you have children between the ages of five and eighteen, please contact Rosemary Nabogis in our office by email at rosemary.nabogis@dor.org or by calling our office at 607-535-2786.