



Guidelines for Liturgical Celebrations During the Season of Lent 2021

The Diocese of Scranton is releasing information for various liturgical celebrations before and during the Season of Lent 2021. Additional information regarding Holy Week and Triduum will also be shared in the coming weeks.

In addition to the information provided below, it is important to note that all *Liturgical Guidelines for the Celebration of Mass During the COVID-19 Pandemic* remain in effect. The protocols pertain to all churches in the 11 counties of the Diocese of Scranton. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, parishes must continue to adhere to all health and safety regulations without exception. Policies including wearing face masks, maintaining proper six foot social distancing and proper hand hygiene remain non-negotiable and are fundamentally rooted in protecting all people in our parishes and maintaining the health and safety of our community.

The obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Masses on holy days remains suspended at this time.

Feast of Saint Blaise/Blessing of Throats

In this time of pandemic, many Catholics may be eager to receive the Blessing of the Throats on the February 3 feast of Saint Blaise or during one of the weekend Masses near the feast. Parishes should be particularly mindful of this.

Due to the necessity to maintain physical distancing, parishes should **NOT** perform individual blessings, touching the throat of each person with two candles joined together in the form of a cross.

Instead, parishes should utilize the general blessing of throats. The priest or deacon may give the blessing to all assembled by extending hands, without the crossed candles, over the people while saying the prayer of blessing. A lay minister says the prayer proper to lay ministers without making the sign of the cross. (Book of Blessings #1628).

Parishioners can be reminded that the efficacy of the blessing lies in the intention of the person offering the blessing, and not on the proximity of the recipient to that person.

It is encouraged that the Prayer of Blessing takes the place of the final blessing at the Mass. If the blessing is conferred during Mass, the blessing follows the homily and general intercessions.

Ash Wednesday – February 17

Parishes should **NOT** follow the usual practice of imposing Ashes by thumb on the forehead of parishioners.

Parishioners should be reminded that receiving ashes is not required. The faithful should recognize that their own internal disposition and intention to repent is the importance of Ash Wednesday and that the ashes are an external sign of that internal reality. Individuals who cannot receive ashes can still enter into Lent with a repentant heart.

Ashes can be distributed to the faithful, as long as there is no direct contact. There are at least two possible ways of doing this. Parishes are encouraged to follow one of the following options:

- Use an individual cotton swab for each recipient to distribute ashes. This would be done by use of a Q-tip type of cotton swab. With the cotton tip, trace a cross on the recipient's forehead. Both the minister and recipient must be properly wearing masks during the distribution. A new Q-tip must be used for each person. After the use, each swab should be placed in a receptacle for burning.
- In much of the world, the normal way of distributing ashes is to sprinkle ashes on top of the head, with no contact, rather than imposing them on the forehead. This way of distribution can be done safely as long as both the minister and the recipient are wearing masks. The minister should sprinkle a small portion of ashes on top of the person's head rather than to trace the sign of the Cross on the person's forehead. Parishes should be aware that this method might require more ashes than most parishes usually use and that should be taken into account in planning for Ash Wednesday. Some explanation of this method will be necessary for the faithful. At the end of this document is a "Note on Ash Wednesday" from the Vatican Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments explaining this process further.
- A small amount of blessed ashes could be prepared, along with a simple prayer service, and provided to take home for household members (similar to sending blessed chalk at Epiphany).

The blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday normally takes place during the celebration of Mass, following the homily and general intercessions. While the Diocese has previously taken efforts to avoid unnecessary movement of the faithful, if both ministers and the faithful remain masked, this process can take place safely with parishioners returning to their seats and allowing Mass to continue.

When circumstances require, the blessing and distribution of ashes may take place apart from Mass, during a celebration of the word of God. (Book of Blessings #1656)

Any individual who is accustomed to distributing ashes at another location, for example, a long-term care facility, are reminded that they must adhere to the safety guidelines of those facilities.

Distribution of Palms

The Diocese of Scranton will resume the practice of providing blessed palms to the faithful this year. Having learned a lot more about COVID-19 over the last year, we believe parishes can develop a safe and effective method that works best in their individual churches.

Some potential methods in which to safely offer palms include:

- Setting up palms on one (or more) tables outside of the church, or in a narthex, so that individuals can pick up the palms as they enter while remaining physically distant. Potentially, several tables containing palms could be set-up on the approach to the church's entrance.
- Leaving palms in pews that have been pre-determined as seating areas for the faithful.

No matter the method of offering palms, it is imperative that a parish communicates to the faithful the importance of maintaining a proper six-foot physical distance during any potential method of receiving palms.

The Light is On For You/Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation should remain available to the faithful throughout the Season of Lent.

"The Light is On For You," an initiative in the Diocese of Scranton in which churches are open for quiet prayer and Confession throughout Lent will continue. Now more than ever, it is important to allow the faithful an opportunity to experience the healing grace of God's mercy.

Beginning on Monday, February 22 of the First Week of Lent and continuing through March 22 of the Fifth Week of Lent, confessions will be heard on each Monday from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in each parish.

All COVID-19 guidelines for Confessions must be followed, including that both the priest and the penitent must wear masks and celebrate the Sacrament in a space which allows for adequate distance from each other.

Parishes should not host larger reconciliation services with multiple priests during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gathering Limits

Many faithful participate in bible study, adult-education programs, and other events during the Lenten season. There are many opportunities to provide for meaningful Lenten devotions virtually. The Office for Parish Life will continue to publish resources.

In addition, parishes may be able to invite in-person Lenten activities beyond the celebration of Mass, IF you can ensure that any events held follow the gathering limits for events in Pennsylvania and all safety protocols. The governing principles of masking and six-foot distancing remain in place.

Devotional practices such as Stations of the Cross and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may take place in person, as well as virtually, with the understanding that appropriate COVID-19 guidelines are maintained. It would be strongly advisable that in-person celebrations of Stations of the Cross would forgo movement around the church by the celebrant.

Some parishes have had success offering a “hybrid” group experience – with some people in attendance physically and others participating virtually. The Spring may also permit a return to some outdoor experiences.

Holy Week

Guidelines from Holy Week 2020 were under different circumstances, so these will be revised soon.

For advance planning, however, the following adjustments will still be necessary:

Holy Thursday – no washing of the feet; solemn public adoration of the Blessed Sacrament only with proper limits of attendees (probably in the church proper rather than a smaller place of repose), and six foot distancing;

Good Friday – the veneration of the cross cannot involve individual acts of veneration such as touching or kissing – either during the service nor during individual visits to the church.

Easter Vigil – In advance planning please bear in mind that the protocols for distancing, masking, reduced length of gathering, and refraining from congregational singing will still be in place. All previously published guidelines for the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation still apply.

Further adjustments and recommendations will be provided as the time nears.

Appendix 1: Note from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

Prot. N. 17/21

NOTE ON ASH WEDNESDAY
Distribution of Ashes in Time of Pandemic

The Priest says the prayer for blessing the ashes. He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything. Then he addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel”, or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”.

The Priest then cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask and distributes the ashes to those who come to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places. The Priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything.

From the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 12 January 2021.

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Prefect

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