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April 15, 2020

My Dearest Friends in Christ,

The Lord is Risen! Alleluia! I hope that you are all safe and well during this coronavirus pandemic. I apologize that it has taken me so long to write to you but the shelter in place order that was given in March caught me a little off guard and I had to scramble to come up with some ministry plans for the parish and the staff. Adding to the stress of the dramatic changes that we had to undergo, I spent some time getting things ready so that the office staff could work from home. However, the parish office remains closed and we are functioning at a very limited capacity. We are also not able to schedule any new events until all this is over. I humbly ask you to be patient with us during this time.

Then I had to come up with a plan for all of our religious education programs. Since the shelter in place was extended through May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the First Communion Mass that was scheduled for May 2<sup>nd</sup> will have to be rescheduled. As soon as things return to normal, I will work on scheduling that Mass and any others that may need to be postponed. Also, since all religious education classes had to be cancelled, please know that everyone who was in the second year of our programs will receive their sacraments this year when we begin to reschedule the Masses. I always schedule my vacation time in July because it is a slower time of the year at the parish. However, I will probably be bypassing that vacation time this year in case I have to reschedule more First Communion Masses, the confirmation Mass and weddings.

Then, it was a challenge to see how I could minister to the people under the new shelter in place order. Since I had already set up a parish Facebook page a few years ago, I began using it as the main means of communication. I then learned how to livestream my Masses and some devotions on Facebook. There were some difficulties in the beginning, and it took a few weeks to work out all of the problems. I also discovered that not everyone uses Facebook, so I created a parish YouTube Channel so that I could upload the Mass videos for the rest of the parish to watch. This was very time consuming and kept me very occupied because I was doing all of this by myself (and still am), using my smartphone as the video camera. I converted the dining room into a small chapel so that I could offer my livestream Masses from there because there was no WIFI in the church.

I was also determined to livestream not only Sunday Masses, but daily Masses as well. Ministering to a bilingual community makes it a little more challenging, so I decided to alternate the language of daily Masses, but to always give a bilingual homily. For the Sunday Masses I decided to do one in English and one in Spanish. It takes me a little more time and mental energy to prepare a bilingual homily, but God has given me the grace to be able to do so. Also, please know that all of the Mass intentions that are in the calendar are being said by Msgr. Whelton, Fr. John Plass (I will say more about Fr. Plass, our new part-time parochial vicar, in a future letter) and myself. Msgr. Whelton is doing well, and he sends his greetings and prayers.

Sadly, I was not able to communicate much at first through the parish webpage, because we have to go through a company that we use for all of our information technology items. Having them as the only ones who can make changes to the webpage makes it harder for anyone to hack our website, which actually happened around nine years ago. Now, however, I have had them upload all the necessary links to the parish webpage, like parish Facebook page, the parish YouTube channel, FORMED, the daily livestream Mass schedule and other valuable links. For those of you not reading this letter on the parish webpage our address is [www.sjccotati.org](http://www.sjccotati.org).

Furthermore, I am constantly uploading articles and prayers to the parish Facebook page in order to help us to stay calm and to help with our faith, hope and charity during this pandemic. I don't think you have to be a member of Facebook to actually browse our parish Facebook page because it is listed as a public non-profit business page. I think you have to be a member only if you want to "like" or comment on something posted. I could be wrong. You can try it by following the link on the parish webpage.

I also went through a little stress by seeing how I could celebrate Holy Week and the Triduum with the new directives that were issued since the Masses were going to be offered without a congregation. Plus, all of the Triduum liturgies could only take place in the church building and not in the dining room chapel. Luckily, a phone line and WIFI was installed in the church by Comcast last week, so it will be easier to livestream Masses from the church building. However, I will still offer the daily Masses from the chapel I created, because it is less stressful offering Mass from the rectory (plus it is a little more cost effective because of heating the church and turning on all the church lights for better video quality) than from the church, and the Sunday Masses will be livestreamed from the church. Now that lent and Holy Week have passed some of my busyness and stress has been lessened.

I also want to thank you all of you who have brought/mailed your weekly donations to the parish. I am truly touched by your generosity. We still have our usual bills to pay, and I also want to make sure that the parish employees are given their wages and benefits in this difficult time. I also learned that the diocese has applied, on behalf of the parishes, for the SBA loans that the government is offering to help us with salaries, but I do not know how long that process will take, or how the approval process works.

This pandemic and shelter in place is something that I don't think any of us were prepared for so please be patient with us as we try to adapt to this new temporary way of life. Hopefully, this

will be over soon, and we can get back to operating as a fully functioning parish. We entrust ourselves and this pandemic to the grace of our loving God.

We now have a lot more time to pray and a lot more reasons for praying. Let us take advantage of this time that we have to remember in prayer all those who have died from the coronavirus, all those who are suffering from it, all healthcare workers, all public safety officials and first responders, all of our leaders, all grocery/retail/restaurant workers, all postal/delivery workers, farmers, field workers, truck drivers, all those who are out of work because of the shelter in place and all of those whom I forgot to mention.

Lastly, I want you to know that I am praying for you very much. In fact, I am not even taking a day off right now so that I can offer Mass every day. However, I do get a few of hours to relax in the evenings, so it works out okay for me. Besides, this is not the time for taking a day off since I can't really go out because I have diabetes and asthma, which puts me in the high-risk group if I were to contract the covid-19 virus, so I have to be very careful. Please know that I miss you all very much and I cannot wait for this pandemic to end so that we can all see each other in church again.

Your Servant in Christ,

Fr. Raúl Lemus