



Reflection from Deacon Ross Beaudoin

We in the U.S. are beginning to see the *light at the end of the tunnel* of the Covid pandemic. Covid vaccines are being administered in amazing numbers. Sure, there are places where Covid infections are on the rise. Also, the U.K. variant is becoming dominant among new cases. Nevertheless, hope is in the air and a return to a more “normal” way of life is coming into sight.

At St. James we saw an increase of in-person attendance at Mass at the end of Lent and into Easter. This felt great, considering that we did not even have Lent and Easter services a year ago! People seem ready to return to in-person worship.

But when the Church returns to pre-pandemic ways, will everything “be the same?” In this most unusual situation, we Catholics have lived in a very different mode for more than a year. The “Mass obligation” that had governed our lives was gone. The Sunday collection was not taken. For some months there were not even parish Masses available. We made our own way. We watched Mass on TV or on our phone: *virtual* participation. Some made their own prayer and worship at home. Those people were in a way the presider and the congregation. Some faithfully sent in their contribution to the parish – it still had bills to pay. We Catholics were not used to this way of functioning! We were left to our own conscience to decide what to do; or not.

How will we feel and what can we expect when the Sunday obligation returns and we are expected to be in the pew with everybody else – and bring our gift to the altar via the collection basket – or online if that is our thing?

The readings of the Easter Season can guide us as we adapt to in-person parish life once again. The Acts of the Apostles, various epistles and the accounts of the resurrected Jesus show us an emerging church. The believers were learning as they went along what it meant to be church, to live as a community of believers in the Risen One. In the gospel today Thomas struggles to understand the meaning of Jesus died-and-risen. We perhaps face a similar struggle as well. The other disciples supported Thomas in his quest. We must include and support all who struggle with belief and expect other believers to support us in our struggles. We are returning to a Church that itself is struggling - in many different ways.

In the Acts of the Apostles we learn how the early believers upheld one another by sharing all that they had. We can make that same generosity part of our lives as we return to greater shared life and companionship – and realize that some are indeed in very great need.

Our eventual return to a more “normal” living of our life in the Church is a blessing from God. Yet we are challenged to make that a re-newed life with the Lord and with each other. Perhaps it will be an “enlightened” expression of our faith in new and diverse ways. We have experienced life and the Church differently now. What have we learned?

~ Peace,
Deacon Ross