

**May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020**

Dear All,

As I write this newsletter, it's late in the afternoon on Thursday, May 21: The Feast of the Ascension. We would normally keep this feast by offering the Eucharist during the day, but I'm glad we'll be able to keep it on Sunday.

Things are beginning to reopen around us, and none too soon. Many of us are tired of sitting cooped up at home all day, and we're eager to stretch our legs again. Meanwhile it can't but be a relief for the many millions now out of work that hiring is starting to happen again. It's important to remember, though, that we are not out of the woods yet. This Wednesday was California's highest number of daily fatalities yet, while it also saw the single largest daily increase in confirmed cases around the world.

Churches, because of our very nature as communities gathering for worship, in confined spaces, where we sing, pray aloud, embrace one another, and share a common table, are difficult places to reopen safely. The advice going around the diocese seems to be, "Disappoint people slowly, at a rate they can bear to hear." Fair enough: it seems unlikely that we will be able to celebrate our first Sunday back (whenever that is to be) with all the pomp and splendor we might wish: no big party, no major choral offering, no full pews, certainly no Chalice, and likely no Hosts; no coffee hour, and no handshaking either. We will need to control the number of people in church, and everyone who is present will need to wear masks. Even under these circumstances it will be a major relief and a huge joy to see you in church again, but it will be some time before we can enjoy the happy, celebratory reunion that we all long for.

This weekend is Memorial Day weekend, and it has me thinking about our national motto -- "E pluribus unum" (Out of many, one), and its sister motto from Switzerland (and Dumas's Three Musketeers!), "Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno" (One for all, all for one). In the time of COVID, we are more aware than usual of the duties of the many towards the one: the duties of a larger public towards its members who are sick, unemployed, or otherwise vulnerable. And it stands to reason that this community-mindedness will be what gets us through. But particularly on Ascension Day, I'm mindful of the corollaries -- one from many, and one for all. In some ways this begins to express the mystery of the Incarnation: that in Christ, God assumes human nature and therefore all humanity into his own divine life. In Paul's language from 2 Corinthians, "one has died for all, therefore all have died." Likewise one has been raised, one has ascended, and in that one, we all have reason to hope.

We can be sure that this one, Christ our Lord, has ascended into heaven, where he continues to intercede for us all. And in the time of COVID (as indeed at any time), the Church can likewise be sure that wherever one of its members prays, wherever a small band offers the Eucharist, wherever a kindness is shown, wherever music is made to God behind the muffle of a mask or in the silence of a single heart, there is the whole church, there is Christ himself, there are all the

hosts of heaven, and there are the healing streams of grace beyond measure. The act of one, whether on the cross or in quarantine, affects all others, in ways great and small. The presence of one, at the altar, on a street corner, in a prayer closet, or at a deathbed, is the presence of all. We make that point most profoundly when we are all together, united in praise and worship of the God who has brought about such a state; but even when we are prevented, the communion remains, ensured by the one whose death and resurrection makes all creation new.

With every good wish for a happy feast of the Ascension and a restful Memorial Day weekend--

Yours faithfully,  
Fr. Blake