

## **Public Catholic Church Services Return To Middlesbrough**

**Catholics will pass a significant milestone on the road towards a return to normality when the first public Mass at St Mary's Cathedral in Middlesbrough in more than three months is celebrated this Sunday (July 5).**

However, there will be some big differences to the usual Sunday service – including the compulsory wearing of face coverings and a cap of 100 places allowed into St Mary's Cathedral to allow the required one-metre-plus social distancing.

Another big change is the way the congregation receive Holy Communion. Worshippers normally line up to receive the Blessed Sacrament in the hand or on the tongue and then sip from a communal chalice.

Now, the priest will say "The Body of Christ" to the whole congregation instead of to each individual communicant, and the people will respond "Amen" together.

He will then give the final blessing before standing near the exit and distributing the Blessed Sacrament in silence into the hand of each person as they leave the church, with no response required.

Starting this Friday, a booking system will be in operation every Friday morning from 9am to noon.

Anyone wishing to reserve a place at Sunday Mass and also any weekday Masses is asked to telephone the cathedral on 01642 597750 between these hours only and leave their name and contact details.

This enables the church to cooperate with the Test and Trace system that has been introduced by the government.

Services were suspended as part of the coronavirus lockdown announced in March.

"We're pleased to have the celebration of Mass back in this way but also very cautious," said cathedral dean Monsignor Gerard Robinson, who is also vicar general of the diocese.

"These are very early, tentative steps and we're very aware of health and safety and the need to do things right.

"We will have stewards at every Mass and after the service the church will be cleaned to get it ready for the following day. I'm so grateful to all the volunteers who have come forward to help. It's a huge ask but the response has been tremendous.

"We're not getting back to normal, because we won't do that until we have found a way of ending this pandemic, but we're aware of how much people have missed receiving the Eucharist during these last few months."

However, Monsignor Robinson stressed that the obligation for Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays has been suspended and is not being reinstated at this time, so people are being encouraged to come to Mass through the week or join online services.

“Those who are still shielding or feeling nervous, particularly the over-70s, might prefer to stay at home,” he said.

“Many churches now live-stream services and we will continue our Mass at 10am each day on YouTube. Mass is also available by phone for those who don’t have access to the internet.”

Catholics will also be able to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) this Friday and Saturday from noon to 2pm, during the time the church is open for private prayer.

This will take place in the cathedral’s Blessed Sacrament Chapel, with a screen between the priest and person confessing.

Masses at St Mary’s are at noon each Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday and 7pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

St Thérèse of Lisieux Catholic Church at Ingleby Barwick is also planning to begin the public celebration of Mass this weekend.