Every crisis brings out the best or the worst in people. Every crisis also brings out the best people and the worst people. And we are getting to see both of these kinds during these days of the pandemic. Here is how I see it: if this pandemic has not made us a more loving people, then perhaps we have missed a great opportunity.

Today’s gospel reading from John centers around love. This section of John’s Gospel is held together by four statements on the fruits of loving or not loving Jesus (14:15, 21, 23, 24).

* “If you love me, you will keep my commandments…, and I will give another Advocate to be with you always” (15).
* “Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me” (21).
* “Whoever loves me will keep my word” (23).
* “Whoever does not love me does not keep my words” (24).

As we prepare ourselves for the feast of the Pentecost coming Sunday, let us briefly reflect on Jesus’ commandments and the fruits of either loving or not loving him.

1. “The Spirit of Truth.” One of the fruits of loving Jesus is that He will ask the Father to give His disciples “another Paraclete.” This paraclete will be with the disciples forever. It is this ever-abiding Paraclete that will set the disciples apart from the world. The world cannot receive the Advocate because the Advocate is the Spirit of Truth. Today’s first reading gives us a great example of the actions of the Spirit to Truth versus the world. Philip went down to the city of Samaria. Those of us who know even basic gospel history know the enmity between the Jews and Samaritans. Yet, the Spirit of Truth led Philip to Samaria. Samaria was the first ethnic and geographical boundary broken in the post-resurrection and post-Pentecost world. The movement of the Spirit of Truth is in the opposite direction of the world. Where the world creates disunity, discord and hate the Spirit of Truth creates unity, understanding, and love. This is because the Spirit of Truth is the Spirit of Love.

As the crisis of this pandemic has unfolded, two kinds of people have emerged - those who are led by the Spirit of Truth and those who are led by the world. Those led by the world focus on disunity, on discord, on difference, on otherness, on hate. Those who are led by the Spirit of Truth, on the other hand, focus on understanding, unity, oneness, and love.

1. “I will not leave you orphans.” Jesus promises to not leave his disciples desolate. He promises to come and remain in an endless presence with his disciples who love him and keep his commandments. How do we understand this endless presence of Jesus? As Jesus says, He is present to us both as an external and an indwelling presence. Of course, our mind immediately goes to the Eucharist – which is the tangible presence of Christ – and the indwelling presence through the Holy Spirit. But more than in any other way, Jesus is present to his disciples in the love that the disciples show Him by keeping His commandments. It is love that makes the Eucharist meaningful. It is love that allows the Spirit to dwell in us. In fact, this ever-abiding presence of Jesus defies our expectations. “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him,’ Jesus says (14:21). Love makes God present to us both as an external and indwelling presence. In fact, love IS the presence.
2. The Other Alternative. A question from Judas in 14:22, brings out the opposite of Jesus’ expectation from his disciples. Jesus says to Judas, “Whoever does not love me, does not keep my words.” Earlier I had said that his section of John’s Gospel is held together by four statements on the FRUITS of loving or not loving Jesus. In this time of the pandemic, whether we love Jesus and keep his commandments can be seen in the fruit we have borne. Because of us, did the world become a more contentious place or a more understanding place? Because of us did world become a more loving place or a divided place? Because of us did someone else experience love and care or did they experience judgment, condemnation and rejection. What is the fruit we have borne? What does the fruit we have borne say about our love for Christ and whether we have kept his word? Think about these things.
* Between IC and SH we will begin public Masses on Tuesday, May 26th. These weekday Masses will be live-streamed Monday – Friday. These weekday Masses will be a regional Mass as IC. This mainly because we are live-streaming this Mass each day until further notice.
* On Saturday’s there will be no morning Mass. However, we will have the regular weekend Saturday Masses – 4:30 pm at IC and 5pm at SH.
* We will begin our public weekend Masses on May 30/31. Sunday Mass timings are 9am at SH and 11 am at IC. The 11am Mass from IC will be live-streamed each Sunday.
* However, note this – as far as trying to make it to Sunday Mass remember weekday Masses and live-streamed Masses all serve the same purpose. So please spread yourself thin. Do not plan on coming to the weekend Masses every weekend. Please give others an opportunity to do the same.
* If you feel unwell, have a cold, allergies, or cough, please refrain from coming. You will only freak others out.
* The numbers in each church, the social distancing guidelines and other safety expectations will be published this week in the bulletin and other social media platforms. Also, we will have family sections, couples’ sections and individual sections. We will direct you to them as you enter the church. Much of the seating will be color coded.
* Most of all, come in love and humility. This is not the time to celebrate the fact that we can have public Masses. We are grateful, yes, but out of respect for the 90,000 people who have died from the pandemic, please come in humility, respect for each other, and most of all, love.
* The reality is that at some point the church will be filled to capacity and some may have to come back on a weekday or the next Sunday. Please be patient and understanding. We are not bouncers and we are not security personnel. We are just parishioners/staff trying to keep everyone safe.
* Our focus will be on safety. But safety will be combined with hospitality and Christian charity.