

# Archbishop Smith: The Path of Return

On Tuesday, May 26th, the Bishops of Alberta announced the guidelines they have established to direct the return of our Dioceses to the public celebration of mass. This “path of return” will be gradual, and followed in alignment with each of the stages of the province’s relaunch strategy. It is good, after two months of inability to gather in our churches, at least to take these small baby steps along the path toward the day when our churches will be full again.

I won’t repeat all the details of our guidelines here. You can read their content, view the explanatory video I have prepared, or check out the stories in Grandin Media. What I’d like to focus upon with you is another path of return, of which we cannot lose sight in the midst of immediate preoccupations.

Last Sunday was the Solemnity of the Ascension, when we recalled the return of Jesus to the Heavenly Father, by Whom he had been sent into the world as our Saviour. Where Jesus has gone, we hope to follow. He himself is the path of return to God, from Whom sin separates humanity. We follow this path by faith in the One who is the path.

Guidelines to direct our journey and define its parameters are necessary. These are given by God Himself in Sacred Scripture and the Church’s Tradition. Their content and directives are far more expansive than the ecclesial guidelines formulated to lead us back to mass, or those of the province to direct a return to regular life. Yet, the message is simple: have faith in Jesus Christ. By faith, we surrender to his authority; by faith, we accept the truth of his love; by faith, we see the truth of things and find clarity and peace.

Following this path, that of faith, proceeds in stages. While the phases of a provincial relaunch are marked by a steady progressive opening of society, the stages of faith in Christ unfold by an ever deeper conversion of heart. Acceptance of the truth, surrender to his sovereignty, shift of lifestyle from self-centeredness to self-gift; these are the trends to monitor on the conversion graph, if you will. Here we need to guard against self-monitoring. Self-assessment is usually more positive than the facts warrant. Only the Holy Spirit knows our hearts fully. Only he can truly assess our progress along “the path of return” to the Father.

Which brings me to this coming Sunday, the Solemnity of Pentecost. We can begin to look forward to that celebration now by recognizing that Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has placed us along the path of return to the Father by uniting us to himself in Baptism. We can begin to pray even now for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit to deepen our faith in Christ and thus move us along the stages of conversion. Let’s all commit to that as Sunday approaches.

That we have a path now of gradual return to the public celebration of mass is reason for thanksgiving and hope. What animates our hearts with peace and joy

is the path of return to the Father, that path which is Jesus Christ, and along which we move by our faith in him.