

A priest rode around in the back of a pickup truck blessing people in Philadelphia

By Alicia Lee, CNN

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Rev. Nicholas Martorano of St. Nick's Catholic Church rode around two parishes in South Philadelphia on the back of a red pickup truck to bless people amid the coronavirus pandemic.

(CNN) — It's not quite the [popemobile](#), but it will have to do.

For nearly two hours on Tuesday evening, Rev. Nicholas Martorano of St. Nick's Catholic Church was driven around South Philadelphia on the back of a red pickup truck, blessing parishioners who haven't been able to attend [Mass in person for months](#).

Of course, the church would normally be the place where the faithful would come to feel at peace and relieve any anxiety caused by the pandemic. But like many other houses of worship, St. Nick's has been closed to the public to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

"Even though we have virtual mass every Sunday and people can tune in, the most important part is missing -- being able to receive Jesus and the Eucharist," Martorano told CNN. So he decided it was best to bring the church to them.

Dozens of parishioners came out of their homes to greet Martorano and receive his blessing, in what is known in the Catholic faith as the The Procession of the Blessed Sacrament.

"Some were crying, some kneeling and receiving the blessing. All of them were grateful and saying, 'Thank you for this. We needed this,'" the priest said.

Frank Quinn, a member of the church for 40 years, drove in a car ahead of Martorano, playing religious music. Brian Donnelly, another longtime member of the church, drove the truck.

"The Blessed Sacrament is our Lord, it's Jesus. As a Catholic, it means a sense of peace, a sense of the Lord being with me and protecting us," Quinn told CNN. "So being able to see (Martorano), it gave them the hope they needed."



Standing for two hours on the back of a pickup truck would be difficult for anybody, but Quinn said the priest took no breaks.

"(Tuesday) was his 70th birthday, but he showed no signs of fatigue and he was full of energy when it was over," Quinn said.

Martorano and his crew currently don't have any more ride-bys scheduled, but he said if the pandemic continues to keep the church doors closed, he won't hesitate to get on the back of the pickup truck once again.