



Dear Parishioners of Holy Spirit:

Bishop Malesic, with the other Latin Catholic Bishops of Ohio, has decided:

that the general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (including the Saturday/Vigil Mass) is to be reinstated (Code of Canon Law [CIC], can. 1247). This will take effect in each of the Dioceses of Ohio the weekend of June 5-6, 2021.

Since March, 2020, this obligation has been dispensed. A dispensation is defined in canon 85 as “the relaxation of a merely ecclesiastical law in a particular case.” The law that had been dispensed is:

On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass (canon 1247).

When I studied canon law, I learned that to understand the law, you have to take into consideration the reason for the law. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that,

The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice.

The Catechism continues:

For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin (2181).

Missing Mass without good reason is a serious matter. To do so deliberately and without serious reason is sinful. Why?

St. Thomas Aquinas talks of worship when he speaks of the virtue of justice, which Aquinas defines as: giving to each one his due. In worship we are giving God what He is due: our worship—and everything that goes with that such as our time. We must realize that we are not doing God a favor by our participation at Sunday Mass, we are doing what is right. Sometimes people will say in confession, “I only missed a Mass or two.” I ask, “How would you feel if your employer missed paying you a paycheck or two?” You would say that you earned that check and are owed it. The God who has created, redeemed and sustained us has earned our worship.

As we think about this we have to remember that for the Church, law is the minimum. Law exists to make sure that we are doing the minimum that we need to do to stay spiritually healthy. St. Paul reminds us that “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13: 10b). Our love for the Lord should draw us to attend every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation out of our want to worship our God and not because “we have to do it.”

Still, there are some just reasons for missing a Mass on a Sunday or Holy Day. The Ohio bishops write:

As has always been the case, those who are ill, have significant health risk factors or care for someone who is immuno-compromised or ill, are exempt from attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, as well as those who have significant fear or anxiety of contracting the coronavirus in a large group of persons (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2181).

The same reasons that the dispensation from Sunday worship was granted to all now is to be determined on an individual basis. Note that sporting events, the want to sleep-in, visiting relatives, etc. do not constitute “serious reason” for missing Mass. My rule of thumb is: does your reason for missing Mass prevent you from doing other things like recreational travel, shopping, meals out, etc. that same day. If there is time for those things, there is time for Mass—don’t forget that many parishes have Sunday evening Mass if you can’t make it in the morning.

If it is for a reason other than health, as your pastor, I do have the ability to dispense an individual from the Sunday Mass obligation in particular cases (i.e., I cannot dispense “the Smith family”, but I can dispense Jane Smith and John Smith, and Sally Smith.) Please talk to me if you would like to ask for a Sunday dispensation.

I know for some it was appreciated that you could watch the Mass in pajamas with a cup of coffee. I encourage you to accept the challenge to step up your faith life as we go into the post-COVID era. Strive for greatness. Strive for more. Strive for love for the Lord.

It is very appropriate that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is reinstated on *Corpus Christi*, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is something that we cannot celebrate and receive apart from the Mass, that we cannot receive virtually, but only when gather to celebrate together.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 440-933-3777 or cstrebler@hspal.org.

I look forward to seeing you again soon, as we gather for Sunday Mass, not out of obligation, but out of love.

Rev. Charles F. Strebler, Pastor