



DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 14, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Today, as a people of faith, we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The very name of this Feast should cause us to take pause as we are once again confronted with God's ways which are so often so far from our ways. Today we rejoice in the fact that God has taken one of the most hideous forms of torture the human mind has ever devised and has turned it into the greatest sign of hope the world can ever know. In the midst of this year of COVID-19, the Holy Cross has stood as a beacon of hope and a constant reminder that no matter how quarantined, hopeless, or out of control our lives seem, to be we are never alone. The Risen Christ is ever with us and we are always walking in the light of our God's promise of salvation. I pray once again that each of you might know in a real and special way the love, mercy, hope, and joy of the barren cross and the empty tomb.

These past months many of us have had crosses to bear that we could not have imagined before COVID-19 became an all too familiar word. One of the heaviest for me was having to close our parish churches to public worship and the celebration of the Eucharist. Over a period of days, all five of the Bishops of the State of Wisconsin issued dispensations from the Sunday Obligation to attend Mass, for all Catholics in our respective Diocese. On June 3, 2020, what a joy it was to inform you that those parishes which were ready to, would begin to, once again, join in community to publicly celebrate the Holy Mass. The dispensation from the Obligation of Sunday Mass attendance was still in force.

Over the past two months or so, the bishops of Wisconsin have had several conversations where we discussed ending the dispensation. On August 31, 2020, it was announced via the Wisconsin Catholic Conference that the five Dioceses of the State of Wisconsin would be ending the dispensation during the month of September. Although it may not be possible or prudent for some to attend the public celebration of the Mass, thanks be to God, there no longer seems to be a reason that rises to the seriousness of a general dispensation for all the faithful.

Therefore, with this letter, I am revoking the dispensation which excused all the faithful from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation effective the weekend of September 26 and 27. As I stated above, the ending of this dispensation does not necessarily mean you as an individual do not have just cause for not attending Mass without incurring serious sin.

Our Catholic Faith teaches us that the obligation to attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation is paramount to who we are. I pray as you read the word "obligation" that it is not being read as a heavy burden of some kind being imposed on you, but rather as your true love response to the total, pure love our God has for each one of us. The Second Vatican Council so clearly teaches us that; full and active participation in the Mass is the primary and indispensable source and summit of the Christian life. Most recently, Pope Francis in his homily on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (June 14, 2020) stated, "We cannot do without the Eucharist because it

is God's memorial. And it heals our wounded memory." Who among us is not in the need of God's healing of body, mind, and spirit in our lives?

As I stated above, even though the general dispensation has been lifted, it does not necessarily mean you have to attend Mass or incur serious sin. There are many health issues and life circumstances which could exempt you. However, if you are simply afraid to go to Mass for fear of catching COVID-19, you may have to ask yourself, "is this a rational fear?" With the practice of social distancing, the great job of sanitizing our parishes are doing, the use of facemasks, hand sanitizer, and our guidelines for the celebration of Mass during these times, I do not think there is any more risk of your contracting COVID-19 at church than if you were in a store, at work, or in any other public setting.

Some of you who are still dispensed from Mass would be anyone:

- *who has tested positive for COVID-19, or come in contact with someone who has tested positive in the past 14 days,
- *is running a fever,
- *has a cough or who has COVID/flu like symptoms.
- *who is in the 'at risk' category due to:
 - *age 60 or older,
 - *compromised immune system,
 - *diabetes,
 - *serious heart conditions,
 - *or if you believe attending Mass would pose an undue risk to other family members such as elderly parents you are caring for is dispensed.
- *who tried to attend Mass but was turned away due to lack of room because of the limitation placed due to social distancing would be dispensed even if they could attend another Mass without extreme difficulty.

For any member of the faithful who in good conscience is uncertain about a just cause, I encourage you to contact your parish priest who can dispense you or even give you some other pious work.

Anyone who does not attend Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation, is urged to keep holy the Lord's Day by watching Mass on TV or live stream, reading Scripture, and through private prayer such as the rosary or Stations of the Cross.

For all who will be attending Mass, please continue to abide by the precautions which have been put into place. Even if you do not feel you need them for your own personal health, be assured that your charitable observance will help others to attend without fear. Please also, let us do what we can to keep our good and faithful priests healthy and safe as they minister to the needs of all.

Once again, I want to thank you for your patience and understanding during this very difficult time.

May the Lord God watch over, guide, guard, bless, and protect you and your loved ones.



Most Rev. James F. Powers
Bishop, Diocese of Superior