

February 9, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Sacred Liturgy, and particularly the Holy Eucharist, is the very heart and foundation of our Catholic faith. It is during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that the saving death and resurrection of Jesus is made present to us, our covenant with Our Lord is renewed, and God, in the person of Jesus Christ, comes to us and makes himself truly present for us in his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. It is an irreplaceable gift; a foretaste of Heaven itself.

When the pandemic first began, in the midst of tremendous uncertainty, it was necessary to suspend all public liturgies. During this time, we assessed the situation in light of public health information and explored a safe way to bring Christ to the people, both through the Word of God and the Sacraments. Given the gravity of the Sunday obligation to attend Mass, this decision was not undertaken lightly. Then, we cautiously returned to Mass with prudent restrictions, such as capacity limits and rigorous cleaning protocols, to allow for the resumption of essential public worship without undue risk of accelerating the pandemic. During these difficult months of pandemic, our pastors, parishes, and all the faithful have adapted in order to ensure the health and well-being of everyone in our local communities. I want to offer my sincere gratitude for the efforts that have been undertaken to implement and maintain the first-rate precautionary measures that have kept our parishes and schools safe.

As part of our adaptations, many of our parishes have broadcast Masses over the internet during these last several months. While this has been a means to help Catholics nourish their souls when they could not be present for Mass, we must remember that it cannot become the norm. God did not come to us virtually. He came to us — and *continues* to come to us — in the flesh. As Catholics, unmediated contact with the Real Presence of the flesh and blood of Our Lord in offering this sacrifice to the Father is irreplaceable and essential. We recall Christ's own words when he foretold the gift of the Holy Eucharist:

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." (John 6: 54-56)

In recognition of the essential and central nature of the Eucharist Sacrifice in our lives as Catholics, and in acknowledgement of my duty as shepherd to care for the souls of everyone within our diocese, it is important that I lead more of us back to Mass, when and where possible. **That is why the general dispensation from the Sunday obligation will be extended only for one month, until March 13.** With its expiration, I intend to grant some particular dispensations to those in need. It is time for us to welcome back more of the faithful with a renewed amazement that we have a God who is so close to us and who has such a deep love for us that he comes to us in flesh and blood. Active participation in Mass is an occasion for all of us to avail ourselves of the immeasurable spiritual graces Christ desires for his faithful through his Paschal Sacrifice.

We know that there remains the concern for spread of infection, particularly among the winter months when we live indoors to a greater degree. All of us must remain vigilant to limit its spread, particularly among those most vulnerable. With this in mind, I am granting particular dispensations from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation for people in certain circumstances, including those who are ill and those who care for anyone who is at-risk of serious complications from COVID-19. I am making a particular request that those who are ill or think they might be ill to refrain from this in-person participation in the liturgy as an act of justice and charity to others. Those who would experience significant anxiety or fear of getting sick from being in a public setting are similarly dispensed from their obligation to attend. **More information about the particular dispensations can be found [here](#).** In allowing the *general* dispensation to expire, we welcome back to Mass all Catholics who have already been engaged in other activities that would present a similar or greater risk of exposure, such as eating out at restaurants, traveling, partaking in non-essential shopping, and widening one's circle of contacts. These individuals should also prepare to return to Mass in recognition of its preeminence in our lives as Catholics.

The health and safety of our communities is and always will be paramount as we continue to closely monitor local conditions. For that reason, I am continuing the liturgical directive that all the faithful present at Mass, with the exception of small children, wear a mask or face-covering. If this proves impossible for you or a family member, please speak with your priest. Additionally, our churches will remain limited to no more than 50 percent of available capacity for the near future, and many other existing protocols will remain in place. The Archdiocese is committed to assisting pastors to adjust Mass schedules or offer additional public Masses, insofar as possible, to make it easier for as many of the faithful as possible to attend Mass while still practicing social distancing during the approaching Lent and Easter seasons.

At the beginning of this pandemic, I entrusted the Archdiocese of Detroit to Our Lady of Lourdes, patroness for those who suffer illness, asking that, through her intercession, God would grant healing and protection to the people of southeast Michigan and beyond. I ask you, brothers and sisters, to join me in offering prayers of thanksgiving to Our Blessed Mother for her intercession so far and to pray for her continued accompaniment. With her help, let us persevere in hope to face the challenges of this virus and continue to give witness to our confidence in the good news of the Lord's victory over suffering and death.

With assurances of my prayers for you, I remain,
Sincerely yours in Christ,
The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit