



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

April 17, 2021

Just over a year ago, we went through the great suffering of the shut down of public Masses due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a very difficult time for all of us which started right as Lent was beginning. All of our parishioners and Catholics throughout the world were deprived of their reception of the Eucharist. Since last May, we have been back at public Masses, and little by little, the way we live our lives has begun to return to normal. Over the last several months, the number of active cases of Covid-19 has continued to drop, and we have seen a very large number of adults who have been vaccinated against the virus.

Because of these factors, the Archbishop has made the decision to reinstate the obligation of Sunday Mass, and revise the Covid-19 guidelines of the Archdiocese, beginning next weekend, April 24-25. This means several things for our community, which I will delve more deeply into in the rest of this letter.

### **The Importance of the Sunday Obligation**

The very last canon in the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church states that the supreme law of the Church must always be the salvation of souls. This means that every law that the Church puts forth is meant to be for the salvation of souls. This is particularly true for the Sunday obligation. In the Gospels, Jesus states that “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.” The obligation to attend Mass on Sunday is given to fulfill the need that we have for the grace of God, in order to grow and deepen our own holiness, and to be transformed week after week into the saints that God created us to be.

Many of us have experienced struggles in our spiritual lives because we have not had regular access to the Eucharist. This is for several reasons. First, as we know, the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. It is the Sacrament in which he gives us his very self, to strengthen us and nourish us on the journey of our spiritual life. Furthermore, the spiritual life is not a life to be lived in isolation. As I have said many times in my homilies, other people are a necessary part of the Christian life. We must be able to gather at Mass in order to worship God properly and grow into that perfect love we are called to have for God and our neighbor.

I want to offer encouragement to those who have been away. I invite you to return to Mass with us again and allow the grace of God to work deeply in your heart. We have missed you and we can't wait to see you soon, to worship with you, and to grow in love for God alongside you.

## Remaining Dispensations

While the general dispensation from the Sunday obligation for all people has been lifted, there are still some important groups that remain dispensed from the Sunday obligation. In the new guidelines, the Archbishop names 5 groups of people who are still not obligated to attend Sunday Mass:

- 1) Those who are ill;
- 2) Those who are caregivers for someone who is ill;
- 3) The homebound;
- 4) Anyone who is unable to receive a COVID vaccine at this time (e.g., women who are pregnant);
- 5) Those who are vulnerable due to age, health, or severe anxiety about becoming ill.

## What Mass Will Look Like

The Church will be open for full capacity beginning on April 24, and all tape will be removed from the pews. For the time being, however, the mask mandate from Archbishop Coakley remains in place. This is a good precaution to take, and is not motivated by fear, but out of charity for those who are still vulnerable, as well as those who are anxious about the virus. For those who still have a need for social distance during Mass, we will have distanced seating in the basement overflow area available. The Mass will be projected on the screen and an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion will bring the Eucharist to those who choose to use this option.

The collection will take place in the normal way, with the basket being passed, and the procession with the gifts will resume. Communion will continue to take place as it has the last several weeks, with all coming forward to the center aisle. Deacon Bob and I, and any other Ministers of Holy Communion, will continue to sanitize our hands before and after the distribution of Holy Communion, and to sanitize our fingers after a parishioner receives communion on the tongue.

These changes will be difficult for many people, but are a great sign of hope at the same time. Please be patient with me, with our parish staff, ministers, and other parishioners as we continue to strive for charity, safety, and growth in the spiritual life. I pray for you all every day, and I hope that this time of grace continues to be fruitful in your lives and the lives of all of your family and friends.

In Christ,



Fr. John Paul Lewis