

We have all known and felt the impact of COVID-19 in so many ways as individuals and families, among friends and at work. It has been a time of hardship and struggle, of separation and isolation. It has also had an impact on our lives of faith. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, has been with us throughout this very difficult period and is most especially near to us when we encounter him in the Eucharist. The Eucharist offers us his healing and peace, his mercy and reconciliation. It is time for everyone to return to the Eucharist with renewed faith and joy.

As life returns to normalcy in so many ways, each Catholic Bishop in Pennsylvania will reinstate the obligation to attend Mass in person on Sundays and Holy Days beginning on Sunday, August 15, 2021, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Bishops had dispensed you from this obligation in March of 2020 as the developing coronavirus pandemic required people not to assemble in group settings. Now, with the impact of the pandemic considerably reduced, it is again possible for the faithful to assemble for the Eucharist and it is time for us to lift the dispensation from the obligation.

The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days comes from our Baptism as Christians. Baptism compels Christians to unite themselves with Christ at the altar in his saving Sacrifice of the Cross. "Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2182). This is the foundation for the law of the Church that binds Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days (*Code of Canon Law*, canon 1247) and the Christian way fully to observe the Third Commandment, to keep holy the Lord's Day (Deuteronomy 5: 12; Exodus 31: 15; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2180-2181).

This obligation, as is always the case, does not apply to those who are seriously ill, have a serious health risk, as well as those who have serious anxiety about being a part of large groups at this time. Likewise, the obligation does not apply to those who care for those who cannot attend Mass in person (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2181). Those who are legitimately excused from Mass on Sundays and Holy Days are encouraged to spend time in prayer, meditating on the Death and Resurrection of the Lord, reading the Sacred Scriptures, and uniting themselves to Christ in his worship of the Father of us all. Those who are legitimately excused are also encouraged to view a broadcast of the Mass which is intended for those who cannot participate in person.

As your Bishops, we welcome this moment of the reinstatement of the obligation for all Catholics in Pennsylvania. This is a moment to thank God anew for the great gift of the Mass and the Real Presence of Jesus to us in his Holy Body and Blood as well as the joy of gathering together as people of faith.