

## LET US RETURN TO THE EUCHARIST WITH JOY!

Letter on the celebration of the liturgy during and after the COVID 19 pandemic to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of the Catholic Church. (excerpts)

The pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus has produced upheavals not only in social, family, economic, educational, and work dynamics, but also in the life of the Christian community, including the liturgical dimension. To prevent the spread of the virus, rigid social distancing was necessary, which had repercussions on a fundamental trait of Christian life: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Mt 18:20); “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:42-44).

This community dimension has a theological meaning: God is a relationship of Persons the Most Holy Trinity. He creates humanity in the relational complementarity between male and female because “it is not good that man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). He puts himself in relationship with man and woman and call them in turn to relationship with him. [...] While the pagans built temples dedicated only to the divinity, to which people had no access, Christians, as soon as they enjoyed freedom of worship, immediately built places that were *domus Dei et domus ecclesiae*, where the faithful could recognize themselves as the community of God, a people summoned for worship and constituted as a holy assembly. God can therefore proclaim: “I am your God, you will be my people” (cf. Ex 6:7; Dt 14:2). The Lord remains faithful to his Covenant (cf. Dt. 7:9) and Israel becomes for this very reason the *Abode of God*, the holy place of his presence in the world (cf. Ex 29:45; Lv 26: 11-12). [...]

The Christian community has never sought isolation and has never made the Church a city with closed doors. Formed in the value of community life and in the search of the common good, Christians have always sought insertion into society, while being aware of an otherness—to be in the world without belonging to it and without being reduced to it (cf. Letter to Diognetus, 5-6). [...] This Congregation is deeply grateful to the Bishops for their commitment and effort in trying to respond in the best possible way to an unforeseen and complex situation.

As soon as circumstances permit, however, it is necessary and urgent to return to the normality of Christian life, which has the church building as its home and the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, as “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10).

Aware the God never abandons the humanity He has created, and that even the hardest trials can bear fruits of grace, we have accepted our distance from the Lord’s altar as a time of Eucharistic fasting, useful for us to rediscover its vital importance, beauty and immeasurable preciousness. [...]

As much as the means of communication perform a valued service to the sick and those who are unable to go to church, and have performed a great service in the broadcast of Holy Mass at a time when there was no possibility of community celebrations, no broadcast is comparable to personal participation or can replace it. On the contrary, these broadcasts alone risk distancing us from a personal and intimate encounter with the incarnate God who gave himself to us not in a virtual way, but really, saying: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (Jn 6:56). This physical contact with the Lord is vital, indispensable, irreplaceable. [...]

Due attention to hygiene and safety regulations cannot lead to the sterilisation of gestures and rites, to the instilling, even unconsciously, of fear and insecurity in the faithful.

It is up to the prudent but firm action of the Bishops to ensure that the participation of the faithful in the celebration of the Eucharist is not reduced by public authorities to a “gathering”, and is not considered comparable or even subordinate to forms of recreational activities.

Liturgical norms are not matters on which civil authorities can legislate, but only the competent ecclesiastical authorities (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 22). [...]

The faithful should be recognised as having the right to receive the Body of Christ and to worship the Lord present in the Eucharist in the manner provided for, without limitations that go even beyond what is provided for by the norms of hygiene issued by public authorities or Bishops. [...]

A sure principle in order not to err is obedience. Obedience to the norms of the Church, obedience to the Bishops. In times of difficulty (e.g. wars, pandemics), Bishops and Episcopal Conferences can give provisional norms which must be obeyed. Obedience safeguards the treasure entrusted to the Church. The measures given by the Bishops and Episcopal Conferences expire when the situation returns to normal.

From the Vatican, 15 August 2020; Robert Cardinal Sarah

