



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

June 8, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them (a scholar of the law) tested him by asking, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:34-39)

“One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, “Which is the first of all the commandments? Jesus replied, “The first is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28-31)

“There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:25-27)

All three Gospels cited above include this speech of Jesus. In it, he recites what is recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy and which the people were to recite every day, many times a day, in worship of God. They were to teach their children to recite these same words every day, many times a day, in worship of God. Jesus, the Son of God and son of Mary, worships his heavenly Father and recites these words of a life that values true worship.

Though the recitation of these words was handed on as law, it was actually a beneficial practice, a medicine to stand strong against evil, despair, and apostasy. This practice, though handed on as a law, enriched the meaning of life in good times and in bad, in joy and in sorrow; God IS! God is LORD! My life is in God’s hands. Therefore, I will praise and worship the Lord.

We are about to recognize the inner meaning of our obligation to come to worship God through Jesus Christ and his Sacraments especially at Mass. It is for us a law for the love of God to be remembered; a medicine for our souls and for our life together as the Body of Christ, the Church. The Holy Eucharist is the means that Jesus gave to us to stand strong against evil, especially in time of temptation. His word in Holy Scripture teaches and encourages, admonishes and converts hearts when they listen. His Sacrifice helps us to renew our Hope and trust in God. The grace of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass draws us closer to God in mind, heart, soul and strength, especially when we allow ourselves to cooperate with God’s singular graces.

Joining today with my brother bishops of the Boston Province in announcing that the dispensation has run its course, we embrace again what we call the first of the six “Precepts of the Church”, namely: “You shall attend Mass on Sundays and Holy days of Obligation.” Since “the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath,” God gives us His Day as an inheritance to remember blessings, ask for graces, ease the burdens of the week’s busyness and to remember that by Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead on a Sunday’s early hours He has given us His day to remember the promise of our own resurrection.

While it is true that **illness, infirmity or truly serious reasons** may impede and therefore **always dispense us of our obligation** to come to Church for Mass, any **casual absence** from Mass **without serious reason** carries the burden of a willful sin against God and neighbor and **must be brought to Confession as soon as possible**.

May our lives be marked by the glory of God who has clothed us in Christ forever!

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter A. Libasci". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Peter A. Libasci
Bishop of Manchester