

We come to Mass because we need to be one with God, and there is no better way to draw near to him than in the sacred liturgy of the Mass. –Bishop John Folda

The Resurrection and the Sunday Mass obligation

“The Lord is Risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!” With these words, I wish a Happy Easter to all the faithful of the Diocese of Fargo and to all people of good will in North Dakota. The annual celebration of Easter is a milestone in our lives every year, a day and an entire season that acknowledges the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. After our solemn remembrance of the passion and death of our Lord, we declare with firm faith that Jesus Christ has conquered death and is risen and now lives forever. This is the cornerstone of our faith, the essential truth that enables us to persevere even when our crosses become heavy and darkness is all around us. Jesus is risen, and he has opened up to all of us the way to eternal life.

This last year has had more than its share of darkness. It was just over a year ago, during Lent, when the COVID-19 pandemic exploded in our nation and around the world. Ordinary activities and employment were suspended, and with deep regret we even suspended the public celebration of Mass in our churches. Last year’s observance of Holy Week and Easter was somber and disappointing because we could not all be present for the greatest liturgies of our Church year.

During the months that followed, countless people have been impacted by the unfolding pandemic. Many of us contracted the coronavirus, and a significant number have died. We were isolated from each other for a time, and many people lost their jobs and their livelihood. And on and on.

But now we have cause to rejoice, because we know in faith that Jesus is risen. With great relief, we are seeing significant gains against the spread of COVID-19, and we are free once again to celebrate the mysteries of our salvation, not just on a screen but in our churches, with our families and with all the faithful gathered again as the Body of Christ.

Last year, at the outset of the global pandemic and health crisis, I dispensed all the faithful within the Diocese of Fargo from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. While many of you have already returned to regular attendance and participation at Mass, the dispensation remained in effect.

But in view of the improved situation throughout our state, the time has come for all of us to return once again to active participation in the liturgical life of the Church. Beginning on the weekend of May 1-2, 2021, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is reinstated for all the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Fargo.

There are some exceptions to this obligation. The dispensation remains in effect for those who are ill or who have reason to believe they were recently exposed to COVID-19 or another contagious disease; those who are confined to their homes, or a hospital, or a nursing facility; those who care for the sick, the infirm, and the homebound; those who are unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own; those with underlying health conditions or in a high-risk category; those who have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by attending Mass. One may always consult their pastor if questions arise about the obligation to attend Mass.

It is fitting that we should return to Mass during the Easter season. Since the days of the Apostles and the early Church, Sunday was considered the Lord’s Day, the day of the Resurrection. The faithful gathered on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ, the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. And ever since then, the Church has observed Sunday as a solemn feast, the one day of the week when all the faithful come together to worship God. The Church teaches us in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life” (1277).

We speak of our Sunday obligation to attend Mass, and it is an obligation because of the worship that we owe to God: “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day” (Exod. 20:8). But we don’t go to Mass only because we have to; we go out of love. We return the love that our Lord offers to us in his saving death and resurrection. We come to hear God’s Word and to receive the incomparable gift of the

Eucharist, which no secular activity could ever match. We come not to be entertained, but to rejoice in the salvation that Jesus won for us by giving his life on the cross and taking it up again on the first Easter. We come to Mass because we need to be one with God, and there is no better way to draw near to him than in the sacred liturgy of the Mass. Without the celebration of the Eucharist and the Lord's Day, we would be aimless and adrift, buffeted by the attractions and the perils of our world. But when we do attend Mass with all the faithful, we know we are rooted in Christ and anchored in the safe harbor of his Church.

Dear brothers and sisters, I pray that all of us will experience the saving grace of our Lord's resurrection in this holy season of Easter. Our Risen Lord waits to meet us, and will be there when we come once again to celebrate his sacrifice, his Mass.

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Decree
Reinstating the General Obligation to Attend Mass

In Nomine Domini. Amen.

Whereas, due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 17, 2020 I dispensed the faithful of the Diocese of Fargo from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; and

Whereas, circumstances now allow us to attend Mass safely;

Therefore, beginning May 1, 2021, the general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is reinstated in the Diocese of Fargo.

This obligation does not apply to those who are ill; those who have reason to believe they were recently exposed to COVID-19 or another serious or contagious illness; those who are confined to their home, a hospital, or a nursing facility; those who care for the sick, the infirm, and the homebound; those who are unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own; those with underlying health conditions or in a high-risk category; and those who have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by attending Mass.

One should consult their pastor if questions arise about the obligation to attend Mass.

With an assurance of prayers for the holiness and good health of all, I extend my apostolic blessing to the faithful of the Diocese of Fargo.

+John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo

Given at the Diocesan Pastoral Center
this 1st day of April, 2021

Mr. Timothy Olson, JCL
Chancellor