



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BURLINGTON

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I greet you via this letter asking that it be read at all the Masses this weekend. Next weekend, you and I will celebrate the 4th of July and offer praise and thanksgiving to God for the blessings of freedom that we have as citizens of this great nation: freedom of speech, press, assembly, and petition among many, but most especially for us Catholics, the freedom of religion which guarantees our right to proclaim and practice our faith in our families and communities.

Celebrating this particular national freedom, as well as the personal freedom of belief given to each human being by God, I announce the return of the "Sunday obligation" beginning next week, namely that each Catholic who has reached the age of reason is once again obligated to attend Sunday Mass. It may seem rather odd for me to talk about "freedom" while re-establishing an obligation. That is certainly true if you and I see the obligation as something that is imposed on us rather than as something we take on. As Catholics, you and I are followers of Christ who are bearers of the great *mandatum* or "commandment" which he gave his disciples at the Last Supper "to do this in memory of me." From the very beginning, the early Church would gather on the first day of the week to carry out that *mandatum* to celebrate the Eucharist. This was not something a Christian could choose to not do. It was the very heart of who they were and who we are. It was an obligation they took on out of love for Christ and His Church. It was something they desired and wanted, not something onerous and burdensome.

My hope is that all of us who are Catholics see participation in the Sunday Mass as something we want to do, not something we have to do. It is a sacred obligation we choose in freedom. We should make every effort to attend Sunday Mass. However, as has been the case from the very beginning of the Church as well, there are times and circumstances when one cannot be present for Sunday Mass: injury, ill-health, mobility issues, age, and now personal safety issues that are still present due to Covid 19. Children who have not been vaccinated, people whose health is compromised so that they have to avoid any risk of contagion as well as their caregivers, may in freedom chose not to attend Sunday Mass. Most parishes which are doing so now will still live-stream Sunday Mass for those who cannot attend. I also urge them to ask for Holy Communion to be brought to them outside of Mass. Simply call your local parish and ask.

I realize, of course, that I am "preaching to the choir" in having this letter read at today's Mass. You are already here in this Church. I ask you to share this information with your family and friends who are not here while also sharing with them the joy you experience and the gratitude you feel in being able to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist, the Sacrament of the sacrifice and the Holy Communion of Christ. May God bless you and your families as you leave this place spreading the Good News wherever you go "that Jesus Christ is Lord!"

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Christopher J. Coyne
Bishop of Burlington