



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of El Paso

Catholic Pastoral Center

Reminder: The Obligation to Attend Mass on Sunday is Back in Place

July 27, 2021

I think most of us would agree that laws are a very important element of the life of a healthy society. Unless we have a basic understanding that red means stop (and it really means STOP!) we would have chaos on our streets. At the same time there are legitimate exceptions to laws. There may be a time when, in the middle of the night, we are rushing someone to the emergency room and we might very legitimately take the chance at passing through a barren intersection although the light is red.

However, our present society has a schizophrenic attitude towards law. On the one hand we can be very insistent upon “law and order”, in fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law. (This is often the case when it applies to others.) And on the other hand, when that law applies to us and asks something difficult, we can easily claim our “individual liberty”.

This behavior toward law is often reflected in the way we behave in regard to laws and teachings of the Church. We tend to interpret them, redefine them, or simply ignore them according to our own personal take and often based upon our own personal advantage.

This has certainly been the case in recent years in regard to laws regarding our responsibility to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. The Fourth Commandment given to Moses on Mount Sinai states, *“Remember, keep holy the Lord’s Day.”* (Ex. 20:8) The First Precept of the Church is, *“To assist at Mass and rest from servile work on all Sundays and holidays of obligation.”*

It has always been the understanding of the Church that the basic meaning of the Fourth Commandment is that Catholics, who are of the age of reason and in reasonably good health, are obligated to worship God in the manner Jesus gave us to worship Him, by attending the Eucharist. One cannot be a faithful practicing Catholic without fulfilling this obligation.

The First Commandment, also received on Mount Sinai and repeated more than once by Jesus, reminding us that we are to love God with our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength (see Mk. 12:30), finds a basic element of its fulfillment in the Sunday Eucharist. In this way we begin to show that we love God before every other love and every other good. God, being the loving Father that he is, brings his sons and daughters together to celebrate the saving Sacrifice of His Son. That is what we do every time Mass is offered.

When the Pandemic began our Holy Father and most bishops throughout the world exercised the authority given to them by Jesus in lifting the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday temporarily. This was a very unique set of circumstances, but we felt that a temporary dispensation was necessary. It was necessary to save the lives of many by assuring that the virus would not be passed on by gathering in close proximity with others at a time when health authorities were telling people to stay at home, if possible.



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Although we have not yet come to a time when we can say that all threats from COVID 19 have passed, I believe that we have come to a point at which our members who are not at elevated risk can return to Mass. Therefore, beginning this coming Sunday, August 1st, I am removing the temporary dispensation from the Sunday Mass Obligation.

As always, this obligation will apply to Catholics that are of the age of reason and in reasonably good health. Those who have a contagious illness, those who are generally confined because of age or other disabilities and those who face extraordinary obstacles that make it practically impossible to attend Mass on a Sunday are not obliged to do so. For those in such categories it is not a sin to miss Mass, although it is sad that they are unable to attend.

I would like to urge you to come back, not grudgingly, but joyfully. The Lord and the People of God in your parish community look forward to having you back. As helpful as the Sunday Mass on television has been, it is no replacement for those who are able to come. Jesus Christ is present with a special power and clarity whenever the Church gathers. Christ is ready to lead you in the worship of His Heavenly Father and to feed you with His Body and Blood.

Come Home!

Bp. Mark Seitz