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Pastoral Letter on the Sunday Obligation

(To be read as the homily the weekend of May 15 & 16)

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has everlasting life and I will raise him up on the Last Day”

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Lafayette,

The third commandment of God, obliges us to keep holy the Lord’s Day. This commandment is fulfilled when we give God the most perfect worship possible, the worship of Jesus Christ himself in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We also observe it by works of charity, spiritual reading, and refraining from unnecessary servile labor to spend time with family and loved ones. In this way we give God the adoration that is His due, nourish our souls with the Body and Blood of Christ and direct our lives to our eternal goal – life with God. This understanding is what we know as the “obligation for Catholics to participate in Mass every Sunday”.

Because of seriousness of the pandemic, the Sunday obligation was dispensed by me to comply with safety directives recommended by health authorities. Now that conditions have improved, people more frequently shop, socialize, go to gyms and participate in other activities outside their homes, the time has come to also observe the Lord’s Day by assisting at Mass on Sundays. I am therefore lifting the dispensation from Sunday Obligation in the Diocese of Lafayette beginning on June 6, 2021, the Feast of Corpus Christi. All Catholics will be seriously obligated to assist at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Those who are sick, in nursing homes, immune-compromised, of advanced age or caring for a sick person at home are, as before, exempt from the obligation.

I am humbled by so many who have already returned to Mass each Sunday. It is a testament to your faith and desire for the Eucharist. I thank God for that. I also wish to thank our many good priests who looked for ways to creatively continue to minister to us in a safe way during the pandemic. After consulting with experts who have confirmed that with proper precautions we can gather together for mass, I think that this is the proper time for us to come together to worship God.

I know that for many, the pandemic has been a time of spiritual renewal, a deeper appreciation for the Mass and a desire to receive the Eucharist. I ask you to join with me on June 6, the Feast of Corpus Christi, to worship God at Mass, hear His word in the Scriptures and be nourished with the Bread of Life, the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Wishing all of you God’s blessings, I am,

Most Reverend J. Douglas Deshotel
Bishop of Lafayette