



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PHOENIX

June 6, 2021

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the Gospel of Saint John, the Lord Jesus tells us, “If you love me, keep my commands.” Participation in Mass on Sundays is one of the most practical ways Catholics respond to the Lord’s love.

Therefore I wish to announce the restoration of the obligation for Sunday and holy day Masses in the Diocese of Phoenix, effective July 1, 2021. On this day we commemorate Saint Junipero Serra, the great missionary and evangelist. He is a shining example of the Church’s mission to announce the joy of the Gospel to all the nations.

Given the current status of the pandemic and the availability of vaccines, I believe it appropriate for the Church to take safe and sensible steps forward in our approach to Mass.

Why should Sunday Mass be an obligation for us? In my recent Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist, entitled *Veneremur Cernui*, I wrote:

The ultimate effect of the Holy Eucharist is not only the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ for our spiritual nourishment, but the transformation of those who receive Holy Communion into “one body, one spirit in Christ.” Through this personal relationship with the Risen Jesus in the Eucharist, we experience the self-sacrificing love of Jesus, who invites us to imitate His love and to bring that love to everyone and every situation of our daily life. (41)

These words help us see that the law mandating Mass attendance is not simply an arbitrary imposition. The obligation arises from the natural demands of love, that those whom the Lord loves must be steadily transformed by His love by means of what He has instituted for our good. Sunday is a “little Easter” each week, the principal day for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is the central day for the celebration of His death and Resurrection (cf. CCC 1167).

Consider the human body. Lungs demand oxygen. The stomach obliges us to consume water and food. Our day is interrupted by the happy obligation to breathe and drink and eat. Likewise for Christ’s Body the Church: the obligation of attendance at Sunday Mass reflects our spiritual need to ingest the power of the Resurrection. Our days, weeks, and years are punctuated by the sweet demand that together at Mass we breathe and drink and eat the gifts of Christ’s grace.

ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING CHRIST

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Nevertheless, there are circumstances when a member of the faithful is “excused for a serious reason” (CCC 2181) from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days.

A serious reason occurs when one is physically or otherwise prevented from attending. For example, if a person is sick or unable to find reasonable transportation, the obligation no longer applies.

Given the current situation of the pandemic, further examples of this are the following:

1. If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have good reason to believe you have contracted it;
2. If you are ill or have a condition that would seriously compromise your health if you contracted COVID-19 or another communicable disease;
3. If you care for the sick, homebound, or infirmed and have a compelling reason for believing that you would infect them by going to Mass;
4. If you are elderly or pregnant and have a serious reason to believe you would put yourself or your child at risk by attending Mass.

In applying this guidance, each person must make use of their good judgement. If someone is unsure, confused, or concerned about a situation not listed here please consult with any priest for clarity. The faithful are always called to the sacred duty to keep holy the sabbath day, so even if one cannot fulfill the Sunday obligation, all are encouraged to spend time in prayer, thanksgiving and rest on Sundays.

May today’s celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and the return of the Sunday obligation on July 1, provide a deep renewal of our love for Sunday Mass in the Diocese of Phoenix. I pray that we will all respond with great joy to the words of our loving Savior: “If you love me, keep my commands.”

Sincerely Yours in the Risen Christ,



+ Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix