

Announced by Cardinal O'Malley:

June 8, 2021

Brothers and Sisters,

"Without the Lord's day, we cannot live!" His Holiness, Pope Benedict, in his homily at the Cathedral of Saint Stephen in Vienna on September 9, 2007, quoted the Abitinian Martyrs, who during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian were arrested for celebrating Sunday Mass. The martyrs responded to the magistrate: "Sine dominico non possumus!" - without the Lord's day, we cannot live! The Pope went on to say: "For these Christians, the Sunday Eucharist was not a commandment, but an inner necessity. Without him who sustains our lives, life itself is empty. To do without or to betray this focus would deprive life of its very foundation, would take away its inner dignity and beauty."

Aware that the opportunity to participate in Sunday Mass is increasingly available and increasingly safe for our Catholic people, we are joining dioceses in the Boston Province (Boston, Fall River, Springfield, Manchester, and Portland) in lifting the dispensation of the Sunday and Holy Day Mass obligation, effective the weekend of June 19 and 20, 2021.

We are mindful of the Lord's statement: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt 18:20). While we certainly can pray alone, there is both strength and blessedness in communal prayer.

We do also note that attendance at Mass is our way of following the Third Commandment of the Decalogue: "Remember the sabbath day - keep it holy. For six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy." (Ex. 20:8,11)

We call to mind the many times we see Jesus observing the sabbath by going to the synagogue and teaching there (Mt 13:54, Mk 1:21-28, Lk 4:16-30, Jn 6:22-59). It is a desire of every Christian to conform his or her life to the life of Jesus, and Jesus went to the synagogue on the sabbath.

Most significantly, receiving the Eucharist is the center of every Catholic life. The Lord commands us to take and eat, and to do it in memory of Him. (Mt 26:26-30, Mk 14:22-26, Lk 22:14-20, 1 Cor 11:23-26, CCC 1324). The Eucharist is food for our difficult journey through life, filling us with joy and strengthening us to embrace our suffering. It transforms us from the inside out and creates a unity among us that is a strong witness to the whole world.

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Therefore, it is with great confidence and trust in the Lord that we reinstate this Sunday Mass obligation. It has been a long, difficult year. People have experienced great pain and suffering throughout this pandemic. Loss of life has been immense. People continue to recover from the long-term effects of the coronavirus.

The heroes among us - our nurses, doctors, first responders and all medical professionals were a source of enormous comfort. Priests brought the Sacrament of the Sick to COVID patients. Now we are able to join together, remembering the lives changed and the sacrifices made. Let us gather together again in joy, as one people united around the Eucharist.

In this year of Saint Joseph, who was always a faithful observer of the sabbath, we chose Father's Day as an appropriate day to encourage all of our people, and especially our families, to return to the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

This obligation does not apply to those who are ill; those who have been recently exposed to COVID or any other communicable illness; those who are confined to their homes or to hospitals or other facilities due to illness, infirmity, frailty, or age; and those who are not yet able to be vaccinated, due to age or any health consideration. Parishioners should consult their local pastor if they have questions about the obligation.

To all of those who have not been able to be with us during this last year, we look forward to welcoming you back to the celebration of the Mass.

Thank you, and God bless you.

Cardinal Sean

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