

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last year, Bishop Thomas John Paprocki issued a dispensation for all Catholics within the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. I am writing to you today to inform you that Bishop Paprocki has announced that effective April 11, the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation will expire and a modified dispensation will go into effect.

April 11 is celebrated liturgically in the Church as Divine Mercy Sunday on the Second Sunday of Easter, beginning with the Saturday anticipated Masses the evening before. As Bishop Paprocki wrote beautifully in his *Catholic Times* column, "The Easter season is a very fitting time to renew our commitment to worship Our Lord every weekend in commemoration of His Resurrection and to pray for God's Divine Mercy to heal the sick and bring an end to this pandemic."

Under the modified dispensation, most Catholics will be obligated to attend Mass, but others will continue to be dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass and Holy Days, including:

- 1) Those 65 years of age or older;
- 2) Those at risk for severe illness due to underlying medical conditions as described by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
- 3) Those who care for the sick, homebound, or infirmed;
- 4) Women who are pregnant;
- 5) Those who cannot be accommodated at Mass because the church was at safe-distancing capacity.

Those who are sick, have a fever, exhibit flu-like symptoms, or who have good reason to think they are asymptomatic of a contagious illness such as COVID-19, are excused from attending Mass and do not require a dispensation. In fact, they are morally obliged not to attend Mass to avoid putting others at risk.

You might be thinking, why is there an obligation to go to Mass? The Mass obligation is an integral part of the sabbath, as giving right worship and gratitude to God and participating in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the Sunday Mass obligation as follows: "The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin ([CCC 2181](#))."

When we become distracted by other activities and things that seem more important than obeying God's command to keep holy the sabbath and fulfill our Sunday Mass obligation, we should be concerned that we have begun to lose sight of what is most important. We owe

gratitude and worship to God, and we should embrace the opportunity to receive God in the Liturgy of the Word and, most importantly, in the Eucharist.

We must also remember that as members of the Church, we are the body of Christ. Worshipping together is a beautiful way we join ourselves as believers with Jesus.

Our parish and others across the diocese will continue to take measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as some pews being roped off to allow for safe distancing, hand sanitizer is present in several locations of the church, the priest sanitizes his hands before distributing communion, churches are cleaned and sanitized, and masks are worn, among other safety measures.

I encourage you to visit [dio.org/backtomass](https://dio.org/backtomass) where you can read Bishop Paprocki's letter and read answers to frequently asked questions about the modified dispensation.

I look forward with great joy to seeing you and worshipping together.

It's time... welcome back to Mass!

Father XXX