

DECREE CONCERNING THE OBLIGATION TO ASSIST AT MASS

Protocol No.: **162-2020**

Re: **SUNDAY OBLIGATION**

Mindful that Catholics have a grave obligation on Sundays and holy days to be present at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the wedding feast of the Lamb, through which the Eucharistic Lord comes to his people in fulfillment of his promise to be with his Church always;

Noting that on March 12, 2020, in response to a serious threat to the public health posed by the spread of the coronavirus, I issued a decree dispensing all the faithful of the Diocese of Madison from the obligation to assist at Mass until further notice;

Considering that, thanks be to God, the threat posed by the coronavirus has diminished in the months since the issuance of that decree and that, moreover, we as a society and a Church have implemented a number of hygienic measures that partially mitigate the risk of transmission during gatherings such as the Mass;

Concluding therefore, in consultation with my brother bishops in the Province of Milwaukee (consisting of the dioceses in the state of Wisconsin) that, while a full resumption of the Sunday obligation may not yet be possible or prudent for some members of the Christian faithful, there is no longer proportionate reason for a general dispensation of all the faithful from an obligation so central to the life in Christ;

At the same time calling to mind that, in accordance with the principles of canon law and moral theology, those who are prevented from attending Mass for grave reasons such as illness or the care of infants (CCC #2181) are consequently not bound by the obligation to attend Mass in the first place, and they may therefore miss Mass on a day of obligation without the fear that they are thereby sinning, displeasing the Lord, or failing in their obligations as a Catholic;

Now, in light of all the foregoing, I, the undersigned Bishop of Madison, effective the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time (the weekend of September 26–27, 2020), hereby revoke the dispensation issued on March 12, 2020, by which all the faithful of the Diocese were excused from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation;

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

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Nevertheless, wishing to provide equitably for the members of the faithful who have reasons for not attending Mass that are rational and judicious even if they are not so serious as to excuse the obligation by their very nature, I hereby dispense the following groups from the obligation to assist at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days for as long as the reason persists:

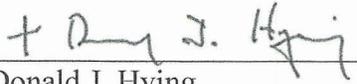
- Those for whom, in their own prudent and prayerful judgment, attending Mass would pose greater than normal risk, either to themselves, to their families and others with whom they have contact, or to those attending Mass, whether the source of the additional risk is their age, health, possible recent exposure, difficulty in observing social distancing guidelines and other hygienic measures, or any other cause, gauged in proportion to the gravity of the obligation in question;
- Those who attempt to attend Mass but, due to the limitations on church capacity imposed by ecclesiastical or civil authority, are either unable to enter the church or else upon arrival voluntarily abstain from doing so in order that others may attend, even if it would be possible to attend another Mass without extreme difficulty;

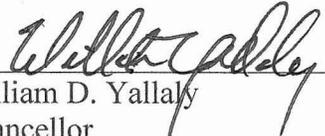
In other cases, the faithful are reminded that for a just cause the pastor of a parish can dispense the faithful of the parish and anyone actually present in the parish from the obligation to attend Mass in individual cases, or may commute the obligation to some other pious work;

Anyone who legitimately does not attend Mass on a given holy day, whether in virtue of this dispensation or for some reason that excuses the obligation by its very nature, is urged to sanctify the day through prayer and pious works such as reading Scripture, praying the rosary, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, or watching the Mass on television;

Lastly, I urge the clergy and all the faithful of the diocese to observe social distancing measures reasonably imposed by ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and to recall that even if they personally regard such measures as unnecessary or inconvenient, their charitable observance of them will help their more vulnerable brothers and sisters attend Mass without fear.

Given at Madison this 2nd day of September, in the year of our Lord 2020.


+Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison


William D. Yallaly
Chancellor