



DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO

McRaith Catholic Center | *Office of the Bishop*

SUNDAY/HOLYDAY OBLIGATION AND LITURGY GUIDELINE UPDATES

Effective June 11, 2021

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we move beyond the worst of the coronavirus pandemic and access to the COVID-19 vaccine has become more widespread, the time has arrived for the good of all the faithful when the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is no longer necessary.

The general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (including the Saturday/Vigil Mass) is to be reinstated (CIC, can. 1247). This will take effect in the Diocese of Owensboro the weekend of June 12-13, 2021. This date was chosen because as of June 11, there will be no state-mandated restrictions, including capacity restrictions on gatherings. As has always been the case, those who have a serious reason are exempt from attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2181). This includes those who are ill, have significant health risk factors or care for someone who is immunocompromised or ill, as well as those who have significant fear or anxiety of contracting the coronavirus in a large group of persons. Nevertheless, these persons should observe the Lord's Day (CIC, can. 1247) and are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday, meditating on the Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection. Kindly consult your pastor with any specific questions regarding the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.

The Book of Exodus reminds us to keep holy the Sabbath day (Exodus 20: 8-10). As Catholics, we are invited by God to gather together in community, and participate fully in the Sunday Eucharist, which is the "source and summit of the Christian life." "Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2182).

The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is not something God asks of us out of his own necessity to be worshipped, but rather a gift to the faithful for their spiritual well-being, eternal salvation and formation in our relationship with God and one another. To that end, St. John Vianney rightly asserts, "There is nothing so great as the Eucharist. If God had something more precious, He would have given it to us." The Eucharist is the greatest gift Christ left to the Church — the gift of Himself. There is no substitute for Mass celebrated in person. As we prepare for the reinstatement of the obligation to attend Mass, we are excited once again to gather together in person without restrictions in our parish churches.

You are welcomed back with great joy and eagerness!

The following will take effect on June 11, 2021. All except the general obligation may be implemented at the pastor's discretion. In six weeks, these practices will be reviewed to ensure that the safety of all is being maintained. If the virus begins to spread in parishes before then, steps will be taken to implement greater safety measures once again.

- The general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is to be reinstated on the weekend of June 12-13, 2021. Again, those who are ill, have significant health risk factors, care for someone who is immuno-compromised or ill, as well as those who have significant fear or anxiety of contracting the coronavirus in a large group of persons are not obliged (CCC 2181).
- Per Kentucky State guidelines, masks are not required for anyone (including those who are unvaccinated), except by personal choice.
- Physical distancing is not required for anyone (including for those who are unvaccinated), except by personal choice.
- Holy water fonts and baptismal fonts may be filled and used by the faithful, but should be cleaned regularly.
- It is recommended that the Sign of Peace is offered without physical touch for now.
- The Precious Blood is not to be distributed to the faithful until further notice.
- At this time, receiving Communion in the hand remains the safest way to ensure that the virus is not being spread from one Communicant to the next. It is strongly recommended, therefore, that Communion in the hand remain as the preferred method for distribution. However, Communion may be received on the tongue at the pastor's discretion, provided that the minister's hands are sanitized before and after. One or more of the following safety measures are to be in place:
 - A server may stand ready with hand sanitizer for the minister to use before and after giving Communion to each person who receives on the tongue.
 - A server may stand ready with a bowl of soapy water and a towel for the minister to use before and after giving Communion to each person who receives on the tongue.
 - Those wishing to receive Communion on the tongue may be asked to receive Communion last.
 - Note: It may be helpful to remind the faithful how to receive Communion on the tongue in a way that is least likely to result in the minister touching the tongue. Consider something along these lines: Open your mouth, extend your tongue, and hold still. Please do not move your neck, head, tongue, mouth or body. Do not move until the minister has placed the Host on your tongue and removed his or her hand.

I am profoundly grateful to our pastors and all of the faithful for their flexibility, fidelity and great generosity in support of the mission of the Church throughout this unprecedented time. As we reflect on our Lord's goodness and mercy in the midst of the sacrifices made during the coronavirus pandemic, we ask St. Joseph to intercede for us, that through his fatherly protection and care, we may experience a renewal of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William F. Medley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'W' and a long, sweeping underline.

Most Reverend William F. Medley
Bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro