



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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Statement on Lifting the Suspension of the Obligation to Attend Sunday & Holy Day Masses

June 2, 2021

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

While God deserves our worship at all times, as our Creator and Redeemer, He Himself has set aside certain days for our common worship. He commanded the Hebrews to honor Him one day a week: *Remember to keep holy the sabbath day* [Exodus 20:8]. For them, that was Saturday, the last day of the week, and they were forbidden to work on that day.

For us Christians, Sunday, the first day of the week, is our weekly holy day, because it is the day when Jesus rose from the dead. Like the Hebrews, we should avoid unnecessary work and shopping on Sunday (modern conditions can make this nearly impossible) but, following the practice of the earliest Christians, our principal way of worshipping God on Sunday is to gather to celebrate Mass.

After changing bread into his sacred Body and wine into his sacred Blood, Jesus said, *Do this in remembrance of me* [Luke 22:19]. We respect the Lord's wishes when we assemble to hear his Word proclaimed and to offer to our Father, together with the priest, the Savior who has made himself present on our altar and who offers himself as food to us in Holy Communion.

It was a hard decision to close our churches to public Masses for two months last year. It was done for everyone's protection until we could figure out how to celebrate Mass safely. I lifted the obligation to go to Mass on Sunday and holy days of obligation so that Catholics of tender conscience would not think they were sinning by not going to Mass.

Now, however, with the pandemic seeming to subside (although it is not over), I am removing the suspension of the obligation of Sunday and holy day Mass attendance. What does this mean in practice?

The precept to take part in Sunday or holy day Mass is serious. It means that healthy persons with the ability to go to Mass should do so. While the precept is serious, the Church has always been mild in its application. Among many situations that could impede your going to Mass, you may be taking care of a sick person or fear bringing home an infection from Mass; you may be traveling a long distance on Sunday (perhaps 100 miles); you may be required to work on Sunday and no local Mass fits into your schedule. In these and similar situations, you are excused from taking part in Mass. But sitting at home watching a live-streamed or televised

Mass, when you are healthy and could easily go to Mass, is not sufficient to fulfill the Sunday Mass obligation. Those who ignore or scoff at this obligation are certainly not respecting God nor honoring the Lord Jesus.

Going to Mass in-person is simply better. We should be with our fellow Catholics to hear the Word of God proclaimed. We can only receive Jesus Christ in the Eucharist by being at Mass. The Lord himself said, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them* [Matthew 18:20]. We are not isolated individuals, but members of a people and that becomes more real to us when we are together.

I urge, then, all our Catholics who do not have genuine excuses for not going to Mass to join us once again in our parishes for Sunday and holy day Masses. Do it to honor the God who made you and the Redeemer who suffered and died for you. Do it for your own benefit and for that of your fellow parishioners. We have missed you and very much wish to see you with us again. Refresh our hearts and your own by coming back to Mass.

May God abundantly bless you and your loved ones!

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Mark E. Brennan

Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston