



DIOCESE OF RAPID CITY

Reinstating the Sunday Obligation

OFFICE OF BISHOP

March 19, 2021
Solemnity of St. Joseph

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic faith because it is during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is made present to us and Our Lord makes himself truly present for us in his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. As one of my brother bishops recently stated, “the Eucharist is an irreplaceable gift, a foretaste of Heaven!”

When the coronavirus pandemic broke out, we explored safe ways to bring Christ to our people, both through the Word of God and the Sacraments in the light of public health recommendations. We put in place prudent restrictions, such as capacity limits and sanitization protocols, to allow for the celebration of Mass and the Sacraments without undue risk of accelerating the pandemic. During the last year our pastors, parishes, and all of the faithful have adapted in order to ensure the health and wellbeing of everyone in our local communities. I am grateful to all of you for your efforts to implement and maintain the things we put into place to keep our parishes and schools safe.

As part of our efforts, many of our parishes have broadcast Masses over the internet. While this has been a means to help Catholics nourish their souls when they could not be present at Mass, we must remember that it cannot become the norm. God did not come to us virtually. He came to us in the flesh. As Catholics, unmediated contact with the Real Presence of the flesh and blood of Our Lord in offering his sacrifice to the Father is essential — and irreplaceable! Remember the Lord’s words in John’s Gospel: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” (John 6:54-56.

Because of the essential and central nature of the Eucharist it is important for me as your bishop to lead you to the Lord Jesus in the Mass. That is why I am reinstating the obligation to participate in Sunday and Holy Day Masses beginning on ***Palm Sunday***. Because we are still dealing with the coronavirus, I am also granting some particular dispensations to those still at risk. It is time for us to come back to Mass with a renewed amazement that we have a God who is so close to us and who has such a deep love for us that he come to us in flesh and blood. Active participation in Mass is an occasion for all of us to avail ourselves of the inexhaustible graces Christ desires to give us in the Eucharist.

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I know that a real concern for spread of infection still remains, especially among those most vulnerable. Because of this important concern I am granting particular dispensations from the obligation to attend Sunday and Holy Day Masses for people in certain circumstances, including those who are ill and those who care for anyone who is at risk of serious complications from COVID-19. I ask all those who are ill or think they might be ill to refrain from in-person attendance at Mass. Those who would experience significant anxiety or fear of getting sick are also dispensed from their obligation to attend Mass. More information about particular dispensations can be found in the list included along with this letter.

In reinstating the Sunday and Holy Day Obligation we welcome back all Catholics who have already been engaged in other activities that would present a similar or greater risk of exposure, such as eating out at restaurants, traveling and partaking in non-essential shopping. These individuals should prepare to return to Mass in recognition of its preeminence in our lives as Catholics.

The health and safety of our communities is very important, and we will continue to monitor local conditions. For that reason, I am continuing to encourage all the faithful present at Mass, with the exception of small children, to wear a mask or face-covering.

The Eucharist is the heart and soul of our Catholic life together. Let us never take this irreplaceable encounter with Christ for granted. And let us continue to pray for an end to this pandemic and for all who are ill.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Muhich", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Most Rev. Peter M. Muhich
Bishop of Rapid City

Enclosure