



LEX CORDIS CARITAS

The law of the heart is love



Bishop Thomas John Paprocki

Ninth Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

General dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass ends April 11

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last year on March 14, 2020, as we began dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, I issued a dispensation for all Catholics within the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. For the next two months, Masses were celebrated without a congregation present, while many people participated in Sunday Mass by watching via livestream video broadcast and making a spiritual Communion. As people began returning to attending Mass in person last May, I said that the dispensation would remain in place for an indefinite period of time, even after we began the re-opening, until there would be greater clarity and confidence that the overall risk associated with the virus is diminished. That time has now come, as the COVID vaccine has been more widely administered and the number of cases has substantially diminished in recent weeks.

The moral obligation to keep holy the Sabbath (the Lord's Day) is a matter of divine law (cf. Exodus 20:8-11). The church specifies that one of the ways that Catholics are normally obliged



JESUS, TRULY PRESENT — As we anticipate Holy Week 2021, we look back at this photo of Bishop Thomas John Paprocki raising the Host during Holy Thursday Mass in 2020. The reflection from the raised chalice is seen lighting up the Host.

Photo by Darren Price

to keep holy the Lord's Day is by participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. While a dispensation from ecclesiastical law may be given for the good of the faithful, a dispensation is a temporary measure that is to cease when the motivating cause ceases.

As the general dispensation is withdrawn, it will still be applicable for people in certain categories, such as those over 65 years of age or who have underlying medical conditions. Others, such as those who are sick, do not need a dispensation, but are automatically excused, and in fact are obliged not to come to church so as not to endanger

others. Please read my decree modifying the dispensation for further details by going to [dio.org/backtomass](https://www.ct.dio.org/backtomass) and answers to frequently asked questions can be found on pages 16-18 in this edition of *Catholic Times*.

In those cases where a person may not have been dispensed or excused from the obligation to attend Mass in one of the categories described in my decree, but may have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass, for example, those who for good reason have not received the COVID vaccine, such persons should speak to their parish priest, who may grant a dispensation in individual cases.

In lifting this general dispensation, I recognize that we should not expect people to come flocking back to church immediately in large numbers. We must remember that the majority of Catholics did not attend weekly Sunday Mass prior to the coronavirus pandemic. We must work diligently to invite people back to church, communicating to them why it is so important to be physically present celebrating with the community of faith and receiving the incomparable gift of the Real Presence of Our Lord into our hearts in the Eucharist. We should also assure them that our churches will continue to take proper



To read more columns by Bishop Thomas John Paprocki or to subscribe, visit [ct.dio.org/bishopscolumn](https://www.ct.dio.org/bishopscolumn).

precautions for their safety, such as safe-distancing, sanitizing of pews and other church furnishings, and mask-wearing as appropriate liturgically. As I said last May when we began to welcome people back to church to attend Mass, we are one body (1 Cor 12:12), and when we gather together in prayer, we know that Christ is in our midst (Matthew 18:20). Also, our faith is not a “virtual” faith; our Lord himself became incarnate and gave us the sacraments, with their physical signs and hidden but real effects. Our Lord said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and

drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:53-54). Our faith is a tangible, physical, and communal reality. We simply cannot properly practice our faith apart from one another and separated from the physical realities of the sacraments (Hebrews 10:25). Therefore, as I said then and repeat again, the suspension of the church’s liturgical and sacramental life can only be temporary and cannot last indefinitely. In consultation with the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Presbyteral Council, I have chosen to lift the general dispensation on Sunday, April 11, 2021, celebrated liturgically in the church as Divine Mercy Sunday on

the Second Sunday of Easter, beginning with the Saturday anticipated Masses the evening before. 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.

Please be assured of my prayers for you as we continue our preparations to celebrate the Paschal Mysteries of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

+ Thomas John Paprocki