



A letter from Bishop Conley

On May 23, the Solemnity of Pentecost 2021, the Sunday and holy day Mass obligation will be restored in the Lincoln Diocese.

I have joined my brother bishops, Archbishop Lucas and Bishop Hanefeldt in making this announcement. During the season of Easter the *Southern Nebraska Register* will publish a catechetical series on this. Yet, I would like to use the occasion of this announcement by recalling the deepest reasons why Catholics have a grave obligation to attend Mass as well as clarify, in light of COVID-19, when the obligation does *not* apply.

The reason all Catholics have a grave obligation of being physically present for Mass on Sundays and holy days is because the Eucharist is at the heart of what it is to be a Christian. In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord is truly present. When the Mass is celebrated, heaven comes to earth and the redemption Jesus attained on the cross comes to us personally. When the scriptures are proclaimed, God Himself speaks to His people.

In Holy Communion, when we receive him worthily, that is, without mortal sin, we are physically and spiritually united to Him and to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Likewise, participation in the celebration of the Eucharist on Sundays is the primary way that we keep the Lord's Day holy and so live out the third Commandment. These are some of the deepest reasons why there is an obligation and why we should freely want to fulfill this obligation.

Nevertheless, there are certain instances when a person is "excused for a serious reason" (CCC 2181) from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days. A serious reason occurs when one is physically or morally prevented from attending. For example, if a person is sick from a bodily illness or if one has no means of reasonable transportation, then he or she is *physically* prevented from attending Mass and the obligation no longer applies.

Likewise, if a parent is taking care of a sick child, or if military personnel would compromise their duty for the common good, then one is *morally* prevented from attending Mass and the obligation no longer applies.

What about COVID-19? Here I would like to offer some guidance of when the obligation does *not* apply:

- If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have good reason to believe that you may have contracted it
- If you are ill or have a condition that would seriously compromise your health if you contracted COVID-19
- If you care for the sick, homebound, or infirmed and have a compelling reason for believing that you would infect them by going to Mass
- If you have significant and grave fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass
- If you are elderly or pregnant and have a serious reason to believe you would put yourself or your child at risk by attending Mass

In applying this guidance, each person must use their good judgment. If someone is unsure, confused, or concerned about a scenario not listed here please consult any priest for clarity.

It is my hope and prayer that the Holy Spirit will continue to bring us all together as a Catholic community throughout the Easter season and that Pentecost will be a time of vital renewal in the Church in Southern Nebraska.

Bishop James D. Conley
Bishop of Lincoln