July 24, 2021

My dear people of God in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux,

Peace be with you! At the onset of the worldwide concern surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, our civil leaders encouraged all sectors of our society to respond with significant measures in order to ensure the minimization of the spread of this virus and mitigate its effects on all of humanity. As a result, strict regulations pertaining to all forms of public gatherings, including assemblies of worship, were implemented.

As your Shepherd and Pastor, I was mindful of the health and safety of all. Out of a sincere concern for the well-being of all, I made the difficult decision to suspend in person celebration of the Mass. Consequently, I chose to dispense us from the obligation to participate in Mass on Sundays. In the midst of these challenges, our priests found creative ways to continue to provide you with pastoral care. I remain very grateful to our priests for their commitment to ministering to you, even in such challenging circumstances.

Over the course of the pandemic year, eventually we began to steadily re-open our church doors and allow our faithful to return to participation at Mass in person - even if in limited capacity and with other restrictions. At the same time, our civil leaders dedicated their time and efforts to finding ways to counter the pandemic and diminish the spread of the virus. I have also begun see the steady increase in the number of people attending Sunday Mass. In a spirit of joy, this has led me to discern that we have come to a point where our entire church community ought to come together and return to the weekly celebration of Sunday Mass.

Over the past year, I have witnessed the challenge it has been to remain focused on our spiritual lives when the Eucharist is absent. Indeed, it is in Jesus that we draw our greatest strength and our deepest blessings. And Jesus is truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is Jesus - Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Thus, I firmly believe that, as has been recently done in other dioceses of our state and around the country, we have arrived at a time when we should once again enjoin everyone to remember that the Eucharist is at the heart of our faith. For these reasons, I have decided to reinstate the Obligation to participate in Mass on Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation.

This reinstatement will take place on the weekend when we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary - August 14 & 15. Beginning with this celebration, Catholics throughout our diocese are invited and obligated to attend the weekly celebration of Sunday Mass. Please hear me. Your spiritual health and relationship with God is the most important thing to me and my ministry as your bishop. I want you to know Jesus. I want you to encounter Him at Mass in His word and in the Eucharist. I want to you to be close to Him.
I know that many of us have already returned to Sunday Mass and I am deeply grateful for your faith and your commitment to God and your parish communities. I pray that this reinstatement of our Sunday obligation might encourage others to return as well.

However, I am aware that there are those who are homebound, elderly, ill, who have compromised immune systems, or who continue to refrain from leisure activities, social contacts, and all forms of gatherings due to health concerns or concerns with regard to the virus. The church in its wisdom and love has always excused the faithful who find themselves in these situations from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. If you are one of these faithful, you are certainly excused from this obligation. Be assured of my prayers for you, as well as those of your parish community. You are never forgotten. You always receive special remembrance in my prayer.

I assume that some of us may have questions regarding the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation. And to that end, I have asked those with whom I closely work to create for us a library of resources to help us better understand the gift of the Mass and why the church so fervently asks and obliges us to attend Mass every Sunday, which is the way that we as Catholics fulfill the commandment to Keep Holy the Lord’s Day. These resources can be found on our diocesan website at htdioocese.org/sunday. You will also find a special article in this month’s Bayou Catholic magazine.

As we prepare for this very significant transition in our liturgical life as a Christian family, I encourage everyone to take to heart the words of the Magnificat - the words of Mary which she proclaimed before her cousin Elizabeth: “He has come to the help of his servant Israel; for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever” (Luke 1:54-55). God has truly come to our help. He continues to come to our help most especially through His Son, Jesus Christ, who is present to us in the Eucharist. It is my hope that we make every effort to respond to this gift by being present to Jesus as well, especially in the celebration of Mass.

May God’s grace and God’s peace be with you. Please pray for me, and be assured of my prayers for you! I remain,

Sincerely in the Lord,

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Bishop of Houma-Thibodaux
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REINSTATING THE PRECEPT OF THE OBLIGATION
TO ATTEND MASS ON SUNDAYS AND OTHER HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

To My Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux:

At the onset of the worldwide concern surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, our civil government leaders enjoined all sectors of our society to respond with significant measures in order to ensure the minimization of the spread of this virus and mitigate its dangerous and deadly effects on all of humanity. As a result, very strict regulations pertaining to all forms of public gatherings, including assemblies of worship, were implemented.

As your Shepherd and Pastor, I was also seriously mindful of your health and safety. Out of an abundance of concern for your well-being, I decided, albeit with much pain and sorrow in my heart, to suspend in person celebrations of the Mass and, consequently, to dispense all of you from the precept of the obligation to participate in Mass on Sundays and other Holy Days. I very grateful to our priests for the way they continued to provide you with pastoral and spiritual care in the midst of these challenges.

Over the course of the pandemic year, we began to steadily re-open our church doors to allow our faithful to return to the participation at Mass in person even in limited capacity and with restrictions. At the same time, our civil leaders also dedicated their time and efforts to finding ways to counter the devastation of this pandemic and to devise health measures to significantly diminish the spread of the virus and increase societal immunity.

Since our churches fully re-opened in recent months, I have seen a steady increase in the number of people attending Sunday Mass. This has led me to discern that we have finally come to a point where our entire communities should return to weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist.

Indeed, it is in the Paschal Sacrifice that we draw our greatest strength and our deepest blessings. Our participation at the celebration of Holy Mass and the frequent reception of Holy Communion should be the most important expressions of our belief that Jesus is truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist. Since the Eucharist is Jesus (body, blood, soul, and divinity), the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives. Moreover, I have also witnessed this past year how it has been a challenge to remain focused on our spiritual lives when the Eucharist is absent, for it is the Eucharist that enables us to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus and remain on the path toward heaven. Thus, I firmly believe that we have arrived at a time when we should once again enjoin everyone to ensure that the Eucharist is at the heart of our faith.

Therefore, in accord with canons 1247 and 1248 of the Code of Canon Law, I hereby reinstate the Precept of the Obligation to participate in the Mass on Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation.
I further decree that this reinstatement will take effect on the weekend when we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 14 & 15) for it is fitting that we emerge from this pandemic inspired by the example of our Lady who pondered in her heart the many blessings of her life, especially the blessing of the Word made flesh who dwell in her.

I am aware that there are still those among us such as the elderly, those who have health vulnerabilities or have compromised immune systems, those who are currently suffering from illnesses and those who chose to refrain, in good faith, from leisure activities, social contacts and all forms of gatherings due to their concerns for their health. The dispensation from the obligation will continue to be applied to them.

As we prepare for this very significant transition in our liturgical life, I encourage everyone to take to heart the words, the Magnificat, of our Mother which she proclaimed before her cousin Elizabeth: “He has come to the help of his servant Israel; for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever” (Luke 1:54-55). God has truly come to our help. He continues to come to our help most especially through His Son, Jesus Christ, who is always present to us in the Eucharist. It is my hope that we make every effort to respond to this gift by being present to Jesus as well, especially in the celebration of Mass.

Given at the Pastoral Center this 3rd day of July, in the Year of Our Lord 2021, the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.

+ Shelton J. Fabre
Most Rev. Shelton J. Fabre
Bishop of Houma-Thibodaux

Very Rev. Jay L. Baker, MCL, JCL
Chancellor