



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Brownsville

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March 8, 2022

To the People of God in the Diocese of Brownsville,

My dear brothers and sisters,

The obligation for Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is rooted in the Church's desire to manifest in all her members the ardent love that unites Christ our Savior to his very own Body. For we are his Body by the grace of Baptism, and in the Eucharistic Sacrifice we are given the life that sustains us as his members.

This love which is enacted, and in which we participate when we gather for the Eucharistic celebration, is our joining to Christ as he glorifies the Eternal Father by the gift of Himself. We are drawn into His offering to the Father. The Eucharist is also the source of our love for one another in Christ, and it equips us to put into practice his gift of persevering and generous love for the world.

The Eucharist is our food for the journey; it unites us to Christ the Lord, even as it moves us to love one another as Christ has loved us. Our care for the poor and the sick flows from this highest of Charities that comes to us from Christ Crucified and Risen. For indeed, the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the wellspring of life and love in the world.

For charity's sake during the height of the pandemic, I granted in the Diocese of Brownsville, a dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass in order to stem the spread of this highly contagious and life-threatening virus. The dispensation was a response to the gravity of the threat, unprecedented in our lifetimes, that the COVID virus caused.

As conditions have improved, more and more people have returned to the practice of participating in the Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. This is a sign of great hope, and of our awareness as Catholics that to be the charitable people the Lord calls us to be, we must, whenever possible, seek the Sacrament of Charity, Christ himself in the Eucharist.

With these things in mind, I will withdraw the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation effective Sunday, March 20, 2022, the third Sunday of Lent. This simply means that the normal obligations for Catholics apply. These obligations include participating in Sunday Mass and using good charitable judgment when approaching the sacred assembly.

The law of the Church must always be applied using good judgment. Thus, even after the dispensation is withdrawn and the obligation returns to its normative expression, individual Catholics and families must use their good judgment in those instances when to attend Mass, would place us or others in danger, or would cause us to neglect an obligation in Charity to someone at home.

The law does not bind us to the impossible. If the choice is between caring for a sick person at home or going to Mass, we should rightly choose to stay with the sick person. The Charity of Christ in the Mass itself requires that we not abandon the sick. Likewise, if we are sick, even with mild symptoms, and it is possibly the COVID virus, we should stay home so as not to endanger others.

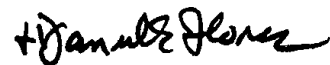
It is likely that the COVID virus and its variants will continue to assail us. Here also we must use good judgment. If you think you are vulnerable to infection due to a compromised overall health condition, limiting your exposure to public gatherings is not unreasonable.

I continue to strongly urge Catholics to receive the available vaccines for their own safety and that of the wider community. I strongly encourage that we continue to use face coverings at Mass, and that we practice the safety protocols to which we have all become accustomed. These include frequent disinfecting of hands, and maintaining a reasonable distance between family groups.

In some ways, the withdrawal of the dispensation is a sign of a tentative return to a kind of normalcy. But, at the same time, the lessons of these many months must not be forgotten. To worship the Father in union with Christ at the Mass is an obligation in conscience. So too is our obligation to live not for ourselves but for Christ and for others. We move forward together keeping both obligations of love in mind.

May the prayers of the Blessed Virgin accompany us, and I place this Diocese under the special protection of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle.

In Christ the Lord,

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

Most Rev. Daniel E Flores, S.T.D.
Bishop of Brownsville