

# ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

Office of the Archbishop

archbishop@catholicaoc.org

513.263.6612



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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you this Lenten season. This has been a most unusual and difficult year for all of us. A year ago at this time, none of us envisioned the anxiety, illnesses, deaths, and other losses that were coming as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We likewise could not have anticipated that the dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation put in place last spring would still be in effect a full year later.

From the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, in the interest of the common good, the Catholic Bishops of Ohio have voluntarily cooperated with the guidance of public health authorities. As you know, last March we temporarily suspended the public celebration of Mass for the safety of our parishioners and to help slow the spread of the virus. In May, we reinstated the public celebration of Mass with strong health and hygiene protocols in place. We have been able to keep churches safely open for public worship since that time thanks to the vigilance of parish leaders and parishioners alike.

As good news in overcoming the pandemic continues to develop each day – and as we together approach the Paschal Triduum, the center of the liturgical year – please prayerfully consider returning to in-person celebration of the Mass this Easter season. As more and more of the social aspects of our lives approach normalcy, so should our communal worship of God, who “so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life (Lumen Gentium, 11). At Mass our souls are nourished by both God’s Word and the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. We recall Christ’s own words as he foretold the salvific gift of the Holy Eucharist: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him 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” (Jn 6: 54-56). This unmediated connection with Our Lord is only possible in person. Moreover, the Mass is where we come together in communion as God’s holy people. Christ brought us together as Church because we need each other. We cannot return to the God who created us out of love without the help and support of other Catholics. This is why God gives us the Church, and this is what we share in most completely at Mass.

Nothing can adequately replace gathering together in person for the live celebration of the Mass. Because the commandment to keep holy the Lord’s Day is never suspended, I am very grateful for the efforts of our pastors and parish leaders to offer remote access to the Mass through livestreaming, and for the many other creative ways in which they have tirelessly continued to minister over these trying months. Many resources for keeping the Lord’s Day holy are available online for those of you who are still unable to participate in person.

The coronavirus pandemic, despite positive trends and widespread vaccination, is not yet over. For that reason, the dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation will remain in place at least for now to not unduly burden the consciences of those who have serious health concerns, either for themselves or for someone in their immediate care. Likewise, please maintain vigilance when it comes to wearing masks, social distancing and using hand sanitizer in church. The health and safety of our communities continues to be of paramount importance. However, for those who are able safely to return, our priests, deacons and I wholeheartedly look forward to worshipping with you in person once more.

During this Lenten season, we unite our sufferings to those of Our Lord Jesus Christ and we trust in the glorious hope of His Resurrection. May God bless you and your loved ones.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr

Archbishop of Cincinnati