



CATHOLIC DIOCESE  
*of*  
**BATON ROUGE**  
Office of the Bishop

21 May 2021

Dear Friends:

Fourteen months ago, almost to the day, our Churches were closed for Sunday Mass and other services to diminish the spread of a new virus, not fully understood and resistant to normal treatments, that was sickening a growing number of people. The virus proved to be deadly to many, overwhelming our hospitals and disrupting our economic, social, and spiritual lives. When Masses in the Churches were cancelled on the weekend of 21/22 March 2020, I immediately issued a dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. This dispensation has remained in effect until now to ease the consciences of many and to encourage all to follow the suggested guidelines to protect themselves and others from COVID-19.

Thanks be to God that we are finally seeing some success in slowing the spread and lessening the danger of contacting the virus! We now have the option to protect ourselves with a vaccination, and many of us are more willing to gather in public places and in homes, eat in restaurants, and shop freely, masked and unmasked. Given our current situation, **the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation in the Diocese of Baton Rouge will expire on the Feast of Corpus Christi (06 June 2021)**, and it will be the serious obligation of those who are capable to attend Sunday Mass in person. I want to assure all our Catholic faithful that it has always been our practice that if a serious reason prevents our attendance at Mass, we are by that fact dispensed of this obligation. In our present situation, a serious reason may be if you have underlying conditions which make the virus more dangerous to you, or if you are simply fearful of gathering in large groups at this time. If this is the case, you should consider yourself exempt from the obligation to attend Mass for these reasons, and you therefore will not need a special dispensation.

Further, in concert with recently issued guidelines from Governor Edwards and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), masks will no longer be required to attend Mass. It is still recommended, however, that masks still be worn by those who are more vulnerable to the virus. Most of the other COVID directives previously promulgated are also abrogated, but pastors, at their discretion, will make decisions on a local level about their "return to normal operations" after weighing his own parish's particular circumstances.

While the past year has been difficult for us all, there are many signs of hope and renewal. I invite all the faithful to return to your Catholic parishes for worship to receive the Bread of Life that nourishes and sustains us all! While Mass attendance is indeed obligatory, this obligation is one born of joy since in it, our hunger to encounter Christ is satiated as we recognize our God in the breaking of the Bread!

Hope the in Lord!

Most Reverend Michael G. Duca  
Bishop of Baton Rouge