

The Holy Mass – A Joyful Duty – Part 2 of 4

Today, August 15, 2021, the Solemnity of the Assumption, the obligation to assist (be present) at Mass in-person is reinstated for Catholic Christians living in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This means that we are to be present for Holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Our absence carries with it the pain of grave sin. Exceptions to this obligation ordinarily consist of those obstacles posed by grave physical (illness) or moral (excess fear, anxiety etc.) factors that would make assisting at Mass difficult if not impossible.

Last week we began to consider the questions: “Is it *“just a rule”* or more?” We looked at the origins of the Lord’s Day. For the Israelite people, the Sabbath rest, the Lord’s Day, signified their imitating God and also His mighty act of liberation on their behalf from slavery to Pharaoh. Moses would receive the command to *“keep holy the Sabbath (the Lord’s Day)”* as one of the Ten Commandments of the Law. In Jesus, the Lord’s day would be perfected in the day of Resurrection; the memorial of Jesus’ conquering sin and death and opening the way to eternal life.

In the celebration of Holy Mass not only on Easter Sunday but every Sunday (even every day), Catholic Christians are renewed in the grace of their Baptism and are equipped to take those graces into the world, nourished by Jesus Christ’s own word and sacrifice, the Eucharist. As the fathers of the Second Vatican Council would emphasize anew the Eucharist in a certain sense makes the Church.

As a good Mother, the Church recognizes that her children sometimes need a nudge in order to pursue what is in their best interest. By the authority passed on to her from Jesus Christ, her spouse, the Church has power to put in place through her legitimate representatives (the Pope and Bishops in communion with him) certain binding precepts (commandments) for the good of the faithful. There are six to which we ordinarily refer. Of the six, one of particular importance is the precept to attend Holy Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. The exceptions to this include those who are sick or impeded from doing so by some grave obstacle.

In matters of grave concern to the faith and morals of the Christian faithful, the Church has an obligation to make laws which will help to preserve those souls on the pilgrimage to heaven that they might not be led astray. Sunday is the primordial feast day for the Christian. If we are going to live up to the name of Christian, we need to be not only with other Christians, but Christ, truly present among us.

During the Pandemic, authorities within the Church recognized, especially early on, that some might, out of love for God and neighbor my encounter undue burden in satisfying the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday. In accord with this concern, for a time, the obligation was lifted and

other means of worshiping God were considered (the Live-Stream Mass etc.). While these satisfied a need for a time, they are always only an anticipation of “being there” at the altar. Recognizing the need to be present at Christ’s saving sacrifice, the Church is again calling her children home, to be renewed, strengthened and sent forth to carry out the joyful duty given her by Jesus our Lord, make disciples of all nations.

~ Rev. Matthew Biedrzycki, Parochial Vicar, Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, Philadelphia