

**DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**



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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Along with the other bishops of Pennsylvania, I give thanks to Almighty God for the progress our country has made in curbing the coronavirus pandemic. Each of us has felt the impact of COVID-19 in many ways as individuals and families, among friends and at work. This has been a time of hardship and struggle, of separation and isolation that has impacted our lives of faith as well. Our Lord Jesus has been near to us throughout this difficult period, especially when we encounter Him in the Holy Eucharist. There He offers us His healing and peace, His mercy and reconciliation. Now the time has come for everyone to return joyfully to the celebration of the Eucharist with thanksgiving and renewed faith.

As life returns to normalcy in many ways, each bishop will reinstate in his diocese the obligation of attending Mass in person on Sundays and Holy Days beginning Sunday, August 15, 2021, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass has been in place since March of 2020 when the developing coronavirus pandemic required people not to assemble in group settings. Now, with the impact of the pandemic considerably reduced, it is possible for the faithful to assemble again for the Eucharist and fitting to restore the obligation.

The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days arises from our Baptism which compels us to unite ourselves with Christ at the altar in His saving Sacrifice of the Cross (*Code of Canon Law*, canon 1247). "Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2182)." The obligation expresses the Christian way to observe the Third Commandment, to keep holy the Lord's Day (Deuteronomy 5:12; Exodus 31:15; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2180-2181).

As is always the case, this obligation does not apply to those who are seriously ill, who have a serious health risk, such as those receiving therapies that suppress immunity, as well as those who have serious anxiety because of large groups. Likewise, the obligation does not apply to those who care for loved ones who cannot attend Mass in person (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2181). Whenever legitimately excused from Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, you are urged to spend time in prayer, meditating on the Death and Resurrection of the Lord, reading the Sacred Scriptures, and uniting yourself to Christ in His worship of the Father of us all. Also, you are encouraged to view a broadcast of the Mass.

As your Bishop, I welcome this moment that reinstates the obligation for all Catholics in the Diocese of Harrisburg on August 15, 2021. For all of us, it is a moment to thank God anew for the great gift of the Holy Mass and the Real Presence of Jesus in His Holy Body and Blood as well as for the joy of gathering together as a believing community of faith.

May God continue to bless you and your families, and may Mary continue to intercede with Her Son to keep us safe and renewed in our love for the Eucharist.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer
Bishop of Harrisburg