

April 9, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers (Acts 2:42).

This Scripture passage reminds us that the Easter Season is an apt time to renew our fidelity to those essential actions that define us as the Body of Christ. Preeminent among these activities is gathering with the Church to celebrate the Most Holy Eucharist on Sundays and Holy Days.

In March of last year, because of the many unknowns that came with the Covid-19 Pandemic, and to protect the most vulnerable among us, after consultation I decided to take the unprecedented step of suspending public Masses and granting a general dispensation to the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Venice from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Together with our fellow citizens, I urged Catholics to exercise caution to protect the health of all. I thank everyone for their patience and understanding during this difficult time.

As the Faithful returned to in-person worship when restrictions were loosened, the Diocese's Clergy and Faithful performed exceptional service in maintaining safety protocols. In recent weeks as vaccines have become available, the news in Florida is encouraging, even more members of the Faithful have returned to our Parishes for Sunday Mass. Our Holy Week and Easter Liturgies were particularly edifying examples of commitment to Christ and the Eucharist. Furthermore, life in Southwest Florida has returned to some level of normalcy; restaurants, stores, and entertainment venues are open, and people of all ages seem willing to return to ordinary activities.

It is apparent that circumstances now allow almost all Catholics to attend Mass safely. Therefore, beginning **May 1, 2021**, the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation will be lifted in the Diocese of Venice.

At the same time, the Faithful should note this obligation does not apply to those who are ill, or others as outlined in the revised guidelines accompanying this letter. The revised guidelines adjust safety protocols to acknowledge that most Catholics can return to in-person worship at their Parish churches.

During this year dedicated to St. Joseph, the Faithful are encouraged to turn to his intercession for protection and courage. Let us be mindful in prayer of those who are no longer with us and those who continue in their recovery. May God bless you and your family.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
Venice in Florida

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