



May 23, 2021
Pentecost Sunday

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Over a year ago, on March 17, 2020, I announced that all public Masses were suspended in the Diocese of Ogdensburg due to the Coronavirus. The faithful were dispensed from their obligation to participate at Sunday Eucharist. After consultation with public health officials, certain protocols were established in our parishes and the public celebration of the Eucharist resumed. Our churches have proven to be among the safest places to come together, a great testament to the ongoing hard work of pastors, parish staffs and our parishioners.

Our parishes have engaged in creative ways to foster worship during this health emergency. Livestreaming has permitted many of the faithful to watch the liturgy. As you know, while this has been a great benefit to so many, it can never replace our actual presence at Mass with our parish family.

The time has come for Catholics to return to public worship at Mass on Sundays. ***On June 6, the Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, I reinstate the obligation to attend Sunday Mass in the Diocese of Ogdensburg.*** However, we remember that there are times when this obligation does not apply:

- If an individual struggles with serious health concerns or is physically or morally prevented from worshipping at Mass;
- If an individual, because of age or illness, believes that going into public places, including Sunday Mass, would place that person's health or that of their loved ones in serious peril; or
- If an individual is sick, has been in contact with someone who has been sick or is caring for a seriously ill person who requires their presence.

I urge our sisters and brothers who are unable to participate at Mass to make holy the Lord's Day by praying, reflecting on Sacred Scripture and performing works of charity.

Why is the obligation lifted now? Things have changed since St. Patrick's Day 2020. A vaccination for the virus has been found to be effective, safe and available. Our protocols have enabled our churches to be safe places to gather. Certain restrictions remain in place, thus providing a measure of comfort for those who attend Mass.

The Eucharist is the "source and summit" of our Catholic faith. The celebration of the Mass is the center of the life of the Church. At every Mass Christ continually nourishes and forms His pilgrim Church as she journeys towards the Kingdom. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "the principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. While we each personally receive Holy Communion, it is not a private devotion. The reception of Holy

Communion is an integral part of our worship as a community of faith. In receiving Holy Communion, we are united to Jesus and to one another.”

Celebrating Mass takes us beyond a narrow concern for ourselves and moves us to promote the common good and to uphold the dignity of every human person. Tragically, even before live-streamed Masses, Catholics have been dramatically absent from Sunday Mass. With the lifting of this dispensation, we pray that more hearts will experience a renewed fervor and love for the Holy Eucharist and in keeping the Lord’s Day every Sunday.

We all need divine medicine and heavenly food for the soul—See you at Mass!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry R. LaValley". The signature is written in a cursive style and is preceded by a small cross symbol.

Reverend Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg