



DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 3, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

May the peace of Christ be with you.

As we quickly approach fall, we enter, yet, another season which reminds us how much our lives and ministries have been impacted and changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of our students have returned to school under strict guidelines. Parishes are gearing up for the return of our young people to faith formation classes, kicking off parish programs and engaging in service and outreach projects and events, also under new guidelines. These initiatives look and will be experienced differently this year, just as our Masses are experienced differently in following our Liturgical Guidelines and Protocols for Resumption of Public Masses.

There are many things today we refer to simply as our “new normal” and, as I have shared in the recent edition of FAITH Saginaw magazine, I am deeply concerned that part of this “new normal” may be leading some of the Faithful away from setting aside the Lord’s day.

As you know, as public Masses in our diocese resumed in May, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remained and remains in place throughout the diocese. Now that the State of Michigan has opened up a great deal, I believe that it is time to lift this dispensation.

Beginning October 1, I will be reinstating the obligation to attend Mass. In doing so, I will be asking Catholics to, guided by Jesus and a well-formed conscience, prayerfully make their own decision about whether to attend Mass or keep the Sabbath holy from home. I have written about this in my column for the next issue of FAITH Saginaw magazine, which you will find attached.

There may be many reasons for not attending weekly Mass as obliged by the Church, and I want to make clear that I continue to encourage all people who are sick in any way, who are fearful of contracting COVID-19 or have concerns about underlying health issues and maybe vulnerable to the disease to remain home. It would not be a sin to do so.

At the same time, in recognizing that the faithful are making decisions each day about whether to shop in person or online, dine in or order out, socialize with family/friends or social distance, I believe theirs, too, is the responsibility to prayerfully decide whether to participate in Sunday Mass in person or keep the Lord’s Day from home.

Many Catholics daily engage in other activities outside of the home that present similar or greater risks of contamination such as eating at restaurants, traveling, non-essential shopping, etc. With our current protocols, our churches are the safest places to be in contrast to other public spaces. I believe that Catholics should begin to return to Mass as they are able.

Being incorporated into Christ's Body through Baptism, attending Mass (when not dispensed) on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation allows us to share in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ offered to the Father. The Church calls us to worship God in this profound way because the Eucharistic liturgy is the work Christ in which we are privileged to participate.

These are, without question, difficult days we are living in, and there are always valid reasons for missing Mass - whether in a pandemic or not. At the same time, we know that, for our spiritual lives, there is nothing which can replace attending Sunday Mass, and no greater gift in all of life than Jesus giving himself to us in a very profound way in the Eucharist.

Be assured of my prayers for you and please pray for me as we continue to navigate these uncharted times together, trusting always in the Lord Jesus who is always with us.

Peace and joy in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+Robert D. Gruss". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw