

CATHOLIC TIMES

June 13, 2021

Lex Cordis Caritas

The Law of the Heart is Love

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

This past April 11, Divine Mercy Sunday, I lifted the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation that was implemented last year in response to the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, I granted a particular dispensation for people in certain categories, such as those over 65 years of age or who have underlying medical conditions.

A dispensation by its very nature is to cease when the reason for the dispensation ceases. In recent weeks, the number of cases of COVID-19 has continued to decrease dramatically. Here in Illinois, the test positivity rate has declined to less than 2%, with more than half of the population fully vaccinated, and hospitalization metrics declining since early May. In light of these encouraging trends, government officials announced that the State of Illinois would enter Phase 5 beginning on June 11, which means that “businesses, large-scale events, conventions, amusement parks, and seated-spectator venues, among others, will be able to operate at full capacity for the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Clearly, the full reopening of secular society means that the time has come for the Church as well to withdraw all remaining particular dispensations from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation, and I have issued a decree to that effect effective on the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Saturday, June 12, 2021.

Those who believe they should continue to be dispensed should speak to their parish priest, who may grant a dispensation in individual cases for a just reason. Those who are ill are excused and do not need a dispensation.

As we return to full capacity in our churches and fulfill our obligation to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, it is a good time for us to re-examine and renew our understanding of many of the sacramental and liturgical practices that were curtailed or restricted during the pandemic, such as the use of holy water, singing at Mass, taking up the collection during the Offertory, and exchanging the sign of peace.

Dipping one’s finger into the holy water font upon entering church may have become a habit that we do almost automatically without thinking about it. We should, however, call to mind at least briefly what it means every time we do this. The holy water is a reminder of our baptism, and we make the sign of the cross with holy water every time we enter a church building because it serves to call to mind our baptism, by which we entered into the Catholic Church and were adopted as children of God, cleansed of our sins, and brought into the Trinitarian communion of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Congregational singing at Mass is important because the Second Vatican Council called for the “full, active, and conscious participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy of the faithful.” We are not mere spectators or passive listeners at a concert performance. As St. Augustine said, “He who sings prays twice.”

Taking up a collection at Mass is not just a means to bring in revenue to pay the church's bills. The collection is purposely taken up at the Offertory, also called the Presentation of the Gifts, because this is the time when we make our sacrificial offering to God, presenting Him with our tithe in gratitude for the gifts entrusted to us as stewards of God's creation. Even when people donate online, I encourage them to put a note in the collection basket indicating the amount of their donation as a symbol of their sacrificial giving.

Exchanging the sign of peace is not just a friendly greeting to those around you, but recalls our Lord's instruction that "if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). We should be at peace with others before we receive Our Lord into our hearts.

It is good that our churches can again be opened to full capacity. I pray that the faithful will return in great numbers and will be able to experience the full richness of our sacred rituals.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

+ Thomas John Paprocki