



Diocese of St. Petersburg
Office of the Bishop

Dear Faithful in Christ,

Greetings and Peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. As Easter approaches, **I hereby announce that the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days for Catholics in the Diocese of St. Petersburg will expire on the Vigil of Pentecost, Saturday, May 22, 2021.** Instead, I will issue some particular dispensations for the faithful who may find themselves in specific circumstances. Details about these particular dispensations are attached and can also be found on the diocesan website (www.dosp.org/coronavirus) and diocesan social media sites. By announcing the change in dispensations now, parishes will have time to make the necessary adaptations to welcome more members of the faithful to the Sunday Masses.

This announcement is also an opportunity to congratulate and thank the clergy and faithful of the diocese. They have done a heroic job ensuring that our churches and other public gathering spaces have been safe. Parishes have been very attentive to having safety protocols in place since we began to welcome parishioners to in-person worship in May 2020. I am deeply appreciative of the creative and innovative ways that our parishes have kept in contact with parishioners and provided access to the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation in novel ways. Thankfully, there have been no outbreaks of COVID-19 attributed to in-person worship in the Diocese of St. Petersburg because of our prudence in following public health guidance.

Many have been or will be vaccinated; and since June 2020, Floridians have safely gone about other activities such as shopping, eating out at restaurants, and reconnecting with family and friends in social gatherings. Therefore, it seems reasonable to strive for the faithful's full and active participation once again in the Sacred Liturgy. Parishes will have to make individual decisions about safely accommodating an increased number of attendees at Mass (for example, adding additional Masses or identifying a section of pews for those who are comfortable with less restrictive distancing between persons). The use of face coverings should be continued until public health guidance suggests otherwise.

Public health officials have learned much about the sources of contagion. It appears that close contact with infected persons poses the most significant risk. Contagion from other sources has proven negligible and is preventable by good personal hygiene, social distancing, and face coverings. Parishes can make prudent decisions about reintroducing worship aids such as missalettes or hymnals and making holy water available.

I encourage the faithful to continue to cooperate with parish guidelines during this time of transition. The diocese has provided to parishes resources for welcoming those returning to Sunday Mass. Let us "welcome one another, then as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). We must never forget that the spiritual fruits of regular and devout participation in the Sacred Mysteries are infinite. The graces received at the Holy Eucharist sustain Catholics as we courageously live the Gospel.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Gregory Parkes
Bishop of St. Petersburg

PARTICULAR DISPENSATION INFORMATION

The general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (including the Vigil Mass at 4:00 pm or later on the previous day) is to be reinstated in the Diocese of St. Petersburg, effective Saturday, May 22, 2021.

Considering the necessity of being physically present with our brothers and sisters at Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation for the Eucharist, Bishop Gregory Parkes asks Catholics to make a sincere judgment about whether or not these circumstances apply. If there is doubt or confusion, consult your parish pastor for clarity.

While the general dispensation is removed, there are specific instances where the dispensation will continue. One does not have an obligation to attend Mass on Sunday in the following circumstances:

1. You are ill, or your health condition would be significantly compromised if you were to contract an infectious illness (i.e., you have underlying conditions or are in a high-risk category). Please use the dispensation and do not attend Mass.
2. You exhibit flu-like symptoms. Please use the dispensation and do not attend Mass.
3. You have good reason to think you might be asymptomatic of a contagious illness (e.g., you were in recent contact with someone who tested positive for a contagious illness such as COVID or influenza). Please use the dispensation and do not attend Mass.
4. You care for the sick, homebound, or infirmed.
5. You are pregnant.
6. Those 65 years of age or older (per the CDC's recommendation of high-risk individuals).
7. You cannot attend Mass through no fault of your own (e.g., no Mass is offered, you are infirmed, or, while wanting to go, you are prevented for some reason you cannot control (e.g., your ride did not show up, the church was at capacity).
8. If you have significant and reasonable fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass.

These categories will be reviewed in due course and revised as needed.

Those who do not attend Mass must still observe the Lord's Day and are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday, meditating on the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection; an excellent way to do this is through participating in a broadcast/live stream of the Sunday Mass.