

Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

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March 15, 2021

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last year on March 14, 2020, as we began dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, I issued a dispensation for all Catholics within the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. For the next two months, Masses were celebrated without a congregation present, while many people participated in Sunday Mass by watching via livestream video broadcast and making a spiritual communion. As people began returning to attending Mass in person last May, I said that the dispensation would remain in place for an indefinite period of time, even after we began the re-opening, until there would be greater clarity and confidence that the overall risk associated with the virus is diminished. That time has now come, as the COVID vaccine has been more widely administered and the number of cases has substantially diminished in recent weeks.

The moral obligation to keep holy the Sabbath (the Lord's Day) is a matter of divine law (cf. Exodus 20:8-11). The Church specifies that one of the ways that Catholics are normally obliged to keep holy the Lord's Day is by participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. While a dispensation from ecclesiastical law may be given for the good of the faithful, a dispensation is a temporary measure that is to cease when the motivating cause ceases.

As the general dispensation is withdrawn, it will still be applicable for people in certain categories, such as those over 65 years of age or who have underlying medical conditions. Others, such as those who are sick, do not need a dispensation, but are automatically excused, and in fact are obliged **not** to come to church so as not to endanger others. Please read my decree modifying the dispensation for further details.

In those cases where a person may not have been dispensed or excused from the obligation to attend Mass in one of the categories described in my decree, but may have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass, for example, those who for good reason have not received the COVID vaccine, such persons should speak to their parish priest, who may grant a dispensation in individual cases.

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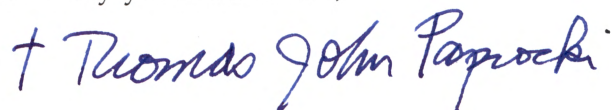
In lifting this general dispensation, I recognize that we should not expect people to come flocking back to church immediately in large numbers. We must remember that the majority of Catholics did not attend weekly Sunday Mass prior to the coronavirus pandemic. We must work diligently to **invite** people back to church, communicating to them why it is so important to be physically present celebrating with the community of faith and receiving the incomparable gift of the Real Presence of Our Lord into our hearts in the Eucharist. We should also assure them that our churches will continue to take proper precautions for their safety, such as safe-distancing, sanitizing of pews and other church furnishings, and mask-wearing as appropriate liturgically.

As I said last May when we began to welcome people back to church to attend Mass, we are one body (1 Cor 12:12), and when we gather together in prayer, we know that Christ is in our midst (Matthew 18:20). Also, our faith is not a “virtual” faith; our Lord Himself became incarnate and gave us the sacraments, with their physical signs and hidden but real effects. Our Lord said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:53-54). Our faith is a tangible, physical, and communal reality. We simply cannot properly practice our faith apart from one another and separated from the physical realities of the sacraments (Hebrews 10:25). Therefore, as I said then and repeat again, the suspension of the Church’s liturgical and sacramental life can only be temporary and cannot last indefinitely.

In consultation with the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Presbyteral Council, I have chosen to lift the general dispensation on Sunday, April 11, 2021, celebrated liturgically in the Church as Divine Mercy Sunday on the Second Sunday of Easter, beginning with the Saturday anticipated Masses the evening before. The Easter season is a very fitting time to renew our commitment to worship Our Lord every weekend in commemoration of His Resurrection and to pray for God’s Divine Mercy to heal the sick and bring an end to this pandemic.

Please be assured of my prayers for you as we continue our preparations to celebrate the Paschal Mysteries of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

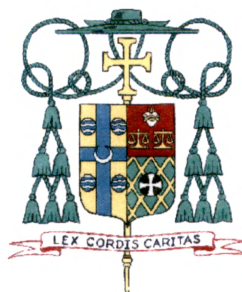
Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "† Thomas John Paprocki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

THOMAS IOANNES

Divina Miseratione et



Apostolicae Sedis Gratia

EPISCOPUS CAMPIFONTIS IN ILLINOIS

DECREE MODIFYING THE DISPENSATION FROM THE OBLIGATION TO ATTEND MASS ON SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen.

Whereas on March 14, 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, all Catholics within the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois were dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice;

Whereas the moral obligation to keep holy the Sabbath (the Lord's Day) is a matter of divine law (cf. Exodus 20:8-11), which was moved from Saturday in the Old Testament to Sunday by virtue of Jesus's Resurrection from the dead on this day;

Whereas ecclesiastical law specifies that one of the ways that Catholics are normally obliged to keep holy the Lord's Day is by participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1247, and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2180);

Whereas a dispensation is the relaxation of a merely ecclesiastical law for the good of the faithful (cf. canons 85-90 of the *Code of Canon Law*);

Whereas a dispensation is to cease with the cessation of the motivating cause (cf. canon 93); and

Whereas the number of cases of COVID-19 has decreased dramatically in recent weeks, allowing businesses, restaurants, bars, sporting events, entertainment and other communal activities to resume while maintaining adequate safety precautions;

Now therefore, I, the Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki, Bishop of Springfield in Illinois, do hereby withdraw the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, effective on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 11, 2021, beginning with the Saturday anticipated Masses the evening before, while maintaining a particular dispensation in the following cases:

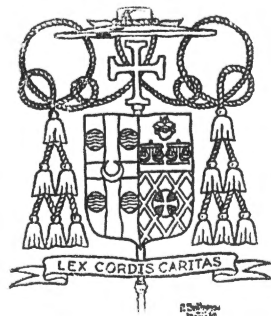
1. Those 65 years of age or older;
2. Those at risk for severe illness due to underlying medical conditions as described by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
3. Those who care for the sick, homebound, or infirmed;
4. Those women who are pregnant;
5. Those who cannot be accommodated at Mass because the church was at safe-distancing capacity.

The following persons do not need a dispensation, but are morally excused from attending Mass, and in fact are morally obliged not to attend Mass so as to avoid putting others at risk:

1. Those who are currently ill;
2. Those who have a fever or exhibit flu-like symptoms;
3. Those who have good reason to think they might be asymptomatic of a contagious illness (e.g., those who were in recent contact with someone who tested positive for a contagious illness such as COVID or influenza).

In those cases where a person may not be dispensed or excused from the obligation to attend Mass in one of the above categories, but may have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass, for example, those who for good reason have not received the COVID vaccine, such persons should speak to their parish priest, who may grant a dispensation in individual cases per canon 1245 of the *Code of Canon Law* and faculty 1709.1 of Book IV, *Diocesan Policies and Procedures*.

Those who are dispensed or excused from the obligation to attend Mass must still fulfill the divine command to keep holy the Lord's Day and are encouraged to do so by participating in a livestream broadcast of the Sunday Mass, spending time in prayer, reading the Bible, praying the Rosary, and/or meditating on the Lord's passion, death and resurrection.



+ Thomas John Paprocki

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

Daren J. Zehnle

Reverend Daren J. Zehnle
Ecclesiastical Notary

Given at the Chancery
March 15, 2021