

“The Church draws her life from the Eucharist”

My dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord Jesus,

The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. With these words, Pope St. John Paul II began his last encyclical letter to the Church on the mystery of the most Holy Eucharist (*Ecclesis de Eucharistia*). Through this encyclical, the saintly Pope wished to rekindle in the Church a new *Eucharistic amazement*. Once we have realized the tremendous gift of the Eucharist that Jesus left to His Church, we should experience a sense of profound amazement and gratitude. In the Eucharist, Jesus has given us the gift of Himself, His true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity under the mere appearance of bread and wine.

This encyclical letter was the inspiration for my own episcopal motto, *Vultum Christi contemplari*. “To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the ‘programme’ which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization. To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. *The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist*; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a ‘mystery of light.’ Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 6)

“The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life. For the most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our passover and living bread. Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to men.’ Consequently, the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord, present in the Sacrament of the Altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of his boundless love.” (Ibid., 1)

This is the heart of the matter. We discover the full manifestation of Christ’s boundless love within the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament of the Lord’s Body and Blood. It is about the love of God for us.

We have all been through a terribly difficult 15 months or more. The impact of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic on the lives of so many people has been profound. So many lives lost, so many grieving loved ones, so many exhausted by battling this disease on the front lines and tending to the sick, not to mention the economic, social, psychological, physical, and emotional toll on many. It has also seriously exacerbated the already deep political and ideological differences among the people of our country.

The impact of COVID-19 on the life of the Church has been no less profound. Seeking to keep people safe and trying to cooperate to the degree possible with civil authorities and their responsibility for public health and the common good has seriously affected the sacramental life of the Church. We all remember, with grief, the near complete shutdown of public life, including attendance at Holy Mass and access to the sacraments, in the early days of this pandemic.

Throughout this pandemic, I tried my best to navigate the complexities involved in making the best prudential judgements regarding our worship and sacramental practice. I did this with the very capable advice of my COVID Response Team and trusted outside consultants, especially devout Catholic medical experts. I am very grateful for everyone involved in this effort. In hindsight, there are things that I would do

differently, but we were trying to respond in real time to a quickly evolving situation for which none of were prepared. Things were changing on a weekly basis. We have all strived to do the best we could given the challenging circumstances.

I am so grateful to all pastors, priests, deacons, staff and volunteers at our parishes and missions for their tremendous leadership and hard work during this difficult time. I could not be more proud of the job they all did while navigating a complex reality for the good of their local communities.

I am especially grateful to all of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Portland for your patience, understanding and cooperation during this past 15 months. With rare exception, you maintained a spirit of unity and cohesiveness, even when you may have disagreed with the decisions being made. Your witness to unity and solidarity was inspiring, truly showing what it means to be the mystical Body of Christ.

With the new status of the COVID pandemic, resulting in far fewer infections, hospitalizations, and deaths, and with so many having chosen to receive the vaccine, the time has come for the most significant change in a long time regarding our divine worship.

Therefore, I am rescinding the general dispensation from the obligation to participate at Holy Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation, which I granted on April 6, 2020. This becomes effective July 16, 2021. This means that the faithful are once again obligated to participate in the Holy Mass on Sundays and on holydays of obligation. I want to emphasize that a serious reason will excuse one from this obligation by virtue of the Church's law itself and as taught in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 2181). If you have any questions or concerns about what constitutes a serious reason in your particular situation, please speak to your pastor. The Archdiocese is also issuing new guidelines for the celebration of Holy Mass and other aspects of parish life.

Recalling how I started this pastoral message, this is not really about obligations and dispensations, is it? It's about *the love of our God* which He has poured out for us in His most beloved Son, Jesus Christ and which is manifested in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus makes Himself present for us in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His own Body and Blood, and then invites us to the feast, which is a foretaste of the eternal life to which we are called and for which we have been created. I find it odd to speak about an *obligation* to receive this incredible gift of love from God and participate in this sacred mystery.

I often think of it this way: If Jesus had invited me to be at the Last Supper, would I have told Him I had something else on my calendar that day? If He had invited me to stand by His mother, Holy Mary, at the foot of the cross, would I have said I had to be somewhere else that day? If He had invited me to be at His tomb when the stone was rolled away as He rose from the dead, would I have replied that I was too busy? *Of course not!* Yet this is precisely what we celebrate and make present during every Mass. We sacramentally participate in the Paschal Mystery, i.e. the passion, death and resurrection of our Savior.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, it's time to return to the Eucharist with joy. For those of you who have already resumed your practice of attending Holy Mass, welcome back! For those who have yet to do so, there is no time like the present. Jesus waits for you with His love beyond all measure!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample
Archbishop of Portland in Oregon