



URGENT MEMORANDUM

To: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders, Parishes, and Religious Houses

From: Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas

Re: Restoration of Masses and Liturgies without Restrictions

Date: Feast of Saint Matthias (May 14, 2021)

*It was not you who chose me, says the Lord,
but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit,
fruit that will last, alleluia.*

-Entrance Antiphon: Feast of Saint Matthias

With praise and thanksgiving to almighty God, the Catholic Bishops of Ohio have together announced the lifting of the dispensation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation. Please see the attached statement from the Ohio Bishops. In accord with the most recent decision of the Catholic Bishops of Ohio, the obligation of the faithful to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation is to resume with the Sunday Masses for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, June 5-6, 2021.

In a statewide address on Wednesday afternoon, May 12, 2021, Governor Mike DeWine announced the lifting of pandemic related restrictions beginning June 2, 2021 with the exception of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The governor exhorted all of us to employ common sense while moving forward.

Please know of my sincere gratitude for all the sacrifices you have made, the efforts you have undertaken, and all that you have done up until now in providing pastoral care for the faithful. As we move forward, be assured of my encouragement for all your good works and of my trust that you will exercise the best practical, pastoral, and prudent judgment as we return to full and unrestricted celebration of the Sacred Liturgy in our churches as well as events and gatherings in

our parishes. Together, by God's grace, we will do our best to provide for the spiritual and pastoral needs of the faithful entrusted to our care.

APPREHENSION OF SOME MEMBERS OF THE FAITHFUL TO ATTEND PUBLIC MASSES AND LITURGIES

Understanding that some members of the faithful may be apprehensive to return to public liturgies, the parish, with great sensitivity, should employ positive and encouraging language when communicating with parishioners, reassuring them that a safe environment is being provided.

Masks/Facial Coverings

Masks and facial coverings are not required. The personal decision by some members of the clergy or the faithful to continue wearing masks/facial coverings while offering Mass should be respected out of charity. Any signage indicating that the wearing of masks/facial coverings is required should be removed. All are reminded that masks/facial coverings are never to be placed on the altar or ambo.

Social Distancing

Social distancing is not required. All seating areas are to be opened up and anything limiting rows/pews/sections is to be removed. According to pastoral need, a designated socially distanced area may be provided for those who prefer such seating.

Exemptions from Mass Attendance and Broadcasts of Mass

Those who have a serious reason, the sick and infirmed as well as those with pre-existing conditions, those who are incapable of physically attending Mass, and those who care for someone who is immuno-compromised are exempt from attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. They should, however, make every effort to watch a broadcast of Mass from their homes.

Members of the faithful who choose not to attend Mass in person out of significant fear or anxiety of contracting the coronavirus in a large group of persons are also exempt from their obligation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2181). Nevertheless, these persons should observe the Lord's Day (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 1247) and are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday, through viewing a broadcast of the Sunday Mass. Masses that are broadcast are not intended as a substitute for persons who are able to gather for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy on Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation. They are intended for the sick, homebound, the imprisoned, etc., who are unable to attend Mass in person.

Parishes are encouraged to continue or begin the commendable practice of providing live-stream broadcasts of their Masses/liturgies on social media for those who cannot physically attend Mass.

MASS SCHEDULES

Parishes are free to maintain or return to their regularly scheduled Mass times or to adjust Mass times as pastorally necessary. The faithful should, of course, be notified of any change or adjustment to the schedule by means of social media, bulletin announcements, mailings or other communication.

PARTICULAR LITURGICAL MATTERS

- Baptismal fonts and Holy Water stoops are to be filled once again with blessed water. Holy Water fonts without filters, or fresh water access, and stoops should continue to be cleaned on a regular basis. The faithful may appreciate being informed of the cleaning schedule for the fonts and other areas of the church by means of periodic bulletin announcements or postings on social media.
- Processions through the congregation at the beginning and end of the liturgy, as well as the offertory procession, may resume.
- The Sign of Peace may be reinstated. The faithful should be reminded/catechized that this simple ritual act is meant to be given to those nearest them and they should refrain from exiting their seats/pews to extend the Sign of Peace to others located throughout the church. The Priest Celebrant always remains in the sanctuary, except for a good reason, so that the celebration is not disrupted (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 154).
- The faithful should also be reminded that the Sign of Peace does not necessarily imply physical touch with others. Some members of the faithful may still be reluctant to extend/receive a physical Sign of Peace and their preference for no physical contact should be respected.
- The faithful should be reminded/catechized to refrain from physical contact (handholding) during the Lord's Prayer, a gesture that is not prescribed in the *Roman Missal*. This moment is an opportunity to explain to the faithful of those congregations where this practice has become a custom that such a practice should be permanently discontinued. Extending hands during the Lord's Prayer is reserved to the Priest Celebrant and concelebrating Priests only who pray together with the people (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 237).
- A full complement of liturgical ministers (altar servers, lectors, ushers, musicians, cantors, choirs) may be reinstated.
- Commissioned Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC's) may once again be employed to serve in their liturgical role, the number of whom may be altered, according to need, at the discretion of the Pastor/Administrator/Presbyteral Administrator & Chaplain.

- The distribution of the Precious Blood from the chalice may be restored at the discretion of the Pastor/Administrator/Presbyteral Moderator & Chaplain. Because some of the faithful may still be reluctant to receive the Precious Blood from a common chalice, fewer Communion stations may be required.
- The reception of Holy Communion (Sacred Host) either on the hand or on the tongue remains the prerogative of the communicant (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds*, 41).
- Priests, deacons, and all liturgical ministers should model good hygienic practices before, during, and after Mass. Priests, deacons, and EMHCs may continue discreetly to use hand sanitizer before Mass, before the Communion procession, and after Mass. The placing of hand sanitizer in a prominent conspicuous location and the use of the sanitizer in an overt conspicuous manner are to be avoided.

SAFETY AND GOOD HYGIENIC PRACTICES

- Pastors/Administrators/ Presbyteral Moderators & Chaplains and Pastoral Leaders should use their discretion going forward as to the cleaning/sanitizing of the churches/chapels entrusted to their care.
- Sacred Vessels should continue to be washed after each Mass, preferably with hot soapy water.
- All liturgical vestments, including altar server albs, should continue to be cleaned on a regular basis.
- Going forward, restroom facilities should continue to be cleaned and sanitized on a regular basis. Items such as soap and disposable towels should be regularly checked in order to maintain an adequate supply.
- Hymnals, missalettes, worship aids, etc. may once again be utilized.
- Collections may resume at the offertory or other designated times, i.e. special collections after Holy Communion.
- Pastors should continue to communicate clearly good hygienic practices and liturgical guidelines to their parishioners in light of residual public health concerns.
- Hand sanitizer may be made available at all entrances to the church building.

VISITS TO NURSING HOMES AND HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Pastoral visits may continue or resume at nursing homes and healthcare facilities mindful of any limitations or restrictions placed by these institutions.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The Office of Communications will assist parishes by creating communications tools regarding the lifting of the dispensation (bulletin announcements, social media posts, etc.) A full toolkit will be available in *Nuntius* on Monday, May 17, 2021.

NOVENA TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

As we near the conclusion of the Easter Season, our minds and hearts turn toward the risen and ascended Lord who sent the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. His promise to be with us always gives us hope and strength to persevere as we move forward together. May the Holy Spirit empower us to be renewed in our unrestricted communal celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and our commitment to Christ and his Church.

I encourage all of you to join me with renewed vigor in daily praying our diocesan novena to the Holy Spirit in thanksgiving for all the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. **The novena begins today, Friday, May 14 and concludes on Saturday, May 22.** The link to the English and Spanish versions of the novena, and the videos of the novena prayed by Bishop Thomas, may be found at the following diocesan links:

English Novena (<https://bit.ly/3bp5Qq2>) and Spanish Novena (<https://bit.ly/3y9bhDv>)

Videos: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP2ZcuB0BXBIG-RB6itWyIt6rK4T_8zAp

