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As Lent leads us to the sacred Triduum and the Solemnity of Easter: the gift of the Lord's Day

A portion of the population of West Tennessee has been fully vaccinated as protection against COVID 19, and many more should receive the vaccine in the near future. Though this new coronavirus and its variants *will continue* to be a threat to the health of the diocesan family of West Tennessee, infection rates and hospitalizations are down significantly. Our Health Departments and the C.D.C. continue to urge ***all of us*** to wear our masks when in public and keep a physical distance between one another and wash and sanitize our hands frequently. Still, this situation is much improved in the twenty-one counties of our Diocese.

And so, please know the following:

FIRST: *The dispensation* from the obligation to attend holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is lifted as of **Palm Sunday, beginning with the Vigil Mass, on the 27th of March.** "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate at Mass (canon 1247 of the Church's Canon Law)." This "obligation" is both a joy and a discipline for Catholics, to gather together as members of the Body of Christ, proclaiming the Presence of the Lord and accepting our commission, as proclaimers of His Victory over sin and death. I ask all Catholics to embrace this spiritual obligation, to join in fellowship at your parish for holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. **While keeping safe during this pandemic, we need to come back to the Sunday celebration of holy Mass.** We need to come back and renew the strength of each parish community of faith.

HAVING SAID THAT, please note, that "If participation in the Eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful...devote themselves to prayer for suitable time alone, as a family... (canon 1248)."

What is a grave cause that would make it impossible to meet this "Sunday obligation"? Granting the continued presence of this highly infectious new coronavirus among our people, *any pre-existing health condition that makes the person or parent or health provider more vulnerable to COVID 19...this kind of issue is the kind of grave cause mentioned in the canon above.* Some of the health preconditions would be: diabetes; any issue with breathing; any medical issue with the heart; a vulnerable immune system; morbid obesity; current medical treatment of an illness, and so on.

I ask all Catholics and their families and friends attending holy Mass to join your Pastor in the fellowship of the Catholic parish for Sunday Mass.

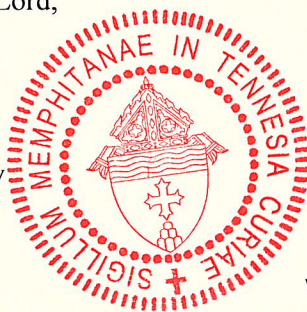
SECOND: please follow the required instructions and restrictions listed below:

1. The withholding of the *cup of blessing* (chalices for Holy Communion) and the withholding of any physical exchange of peace during Mass continues in effect *until further notice*.

2. A protective “physical distancing” is to be maintained *until further notice*. However, families living in the same household should be encouraged to sit together as well as the inclusion of those fully vaccinated.
3. All C.D.C. guidelines for personal hygiene are to be followed. Facial coverings (masks) are to be worn while at the parish or mission, *until further notice*.
4. The Pastor is to urge all of his parishioners to know that, out of love for their clergy and their neighbor, that during these difficult days when COVID 19 continues to infect our people, it is preferable to receive the Eucharist in their hands *until further notice*. We urge this, but gently and with sensitivity. The communicant should take off his or her mask just before approaching the cleric or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, putting it back on after reception of Holy Communion.
5. All clergy and all that assist them in administering Holy Communion should take every precaution: purifying hands thoroughly before and after offering Holy Communion; wearing a face mask during the Rite of Communion, *until further notice*.
6. In addition to the Nave-worship space, other parish meeting rooms are limited only by the discipline of appropriate physical distancing.
7. In our parishes and missions, social gatherings *after* the celebration of baptisms, weddings, funerals and, *quinceañeras* are to be restricted by the discipline of physical distancing. Pastors are to decide whether food is offered at these post-celebration socials, but this practice of food-fellowship is not presently encouraged by health authorities.
8. Choirs may assist our worship during holy Mass, with proper distancing and the use of masks.
9. The “collection basket” is not to be passed person to person. Either have a common bowl that people drop their offerings in or have the ushers with the baskets on poles collect the offering. Also, consider, for the time being, to try and limit common touching of items so multiple people won’t be handling books or monthly worship aides. Consider paper song sheets with the lyrics printed on them instead.
10. Please continue to sanitize the pews as needed between Masses.

This Decree is given on the 15th of March 2021 and takes effect on the 27th of March 2021. I am yours, in the light and love of the Risen Lord,

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Most Reverend David P. Talley




Very Reverend James Clark, J.V., Chancellor