

“I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.” [1 Corinthians 11:23-26]

Brothers and Sisters,

With these words St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians instructs the Church in Corinth about the awesome mystery of the Eucharist which makes the death and resurrection of the Lord present to his disciples. St. Paul knew from the Lord himself how important the Eucharist is: a sacrament that feeds us with his body, blood, soul and divinity! In the Mass Our Lord makes himself present so that we can receive him and be transformed by him. There is no sacrament more powerful or important than the Eucharist!

The Lord Jesus did not come to us virtually, but in flesh and blood. When he returned to the Father after accomplishing our salvation, he made his life, miracles and ministry — and especially his passion, death, and resurrection — pass over into the sacred mysteries which we more commonly refer to as the sacraments. Each of the seven sacraments is an important encounter with Christ, but the most important and powerful of the sacraments is the Eucharist. There is no more intense way of encountering the Lord than the Eucharist, which is why he commanded us to celebrate and receive him in the Mass.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, steps needed to be taken to keep people safe and healthy. We took this new virus seriously and put into place protocols and restrictions after listening to the advice of medical professionals. I want to thank you for your cooperation as we worked our way through the many challenges of the pandemic.

Now that vaccines are increasingly available and more and more people are being vaccinated, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel and begin making preparations to resume our normal activities — especially gathering to celebrate and receive the Eucharist.

After much prayer and reflection, I have decided that the time has come to reinstitute the Obligation to attend Sunday and Holy Day Mass. As your bishop I have a deep concern not only for your physical safety but also for your spiritual welfare. Sunday Mass is the heart of our Catholic life. The Eucharist is an irreplaceable gift given to us by the Lord himself and an essential part of our relationship with him.

I am grateful that we have been able to use modern technology to broadcast Masses from our Cathedral and parish churches so that we could maintain as much connection with each other as possible during this past year. I want to thank our priests and deacons and many of you who have generously made those broadcasts possible. They have been, and are, a wonderful way for our sick and vulnerable brothers and sisters to be with us when gathering in person is not safe.

Now that many of us are shopping and dining out safely, how can I not remind you that we have an obligation to attend Sunday Mass?

It is time to come back to church.

And so, at the beginning of Holy Week on Palm Sunday I am reinstating the Sunday Obligation. I urge those of you who do not have underlying conditions or other risk factors to join your brothers and sisters in marking this holiest week of the year by participating in the liturgies of Holy Week and by making a good confession before Easter comes. Together we can once again proclaim Jesus Christ's victory over sin and death and receive the new life only he can give us by receiving him in the Eucharist.

Because the obligation to attend Mass never applies to those who are ill or at risk or who might pose a risk to those they care for, I have included a list of exceptions to the Sunday Obligation. If you find yourself in one of the situations listed, please stay home and stay safe.

As your bishop I want you to know Jesus and be strong in your faith, so that all of western South Dakota will be drawn to the Lord by the witness of your life. There is no better way for that to happen than for you to have the Eucharist at the center of your life.

God bless you and those you love during this holy season and God Bless the
Diocese of Rapid City.

Bishop Peter Muhich
Diocese of Rapid City