



Obligation: Law and Love

General Principles

- We are obligated by Church law to participate in Mass on Sundays and holy days.
- We are also obligated as a response to the love of God, shown and shared through Jesus Christ
- The more deeply we grow in gratitude for the blessings of life, salvation, faith, gifts, and resources, the more fully we will celebrate Eucharist.
- Our participation in the Eucharist changes us.

Source Documents

- Heb 10:19-25
- Det 5:12-15
- *Dies Domini* (Pope St. John Paul II)
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2180-2181
- *Code of Canon Law*, 1246
- *Sacramentum Caritatis*, #73



Source Quotes

"Since the Eucharist is the very heart of Sunday, it is clear why, from the earliest centuries, the Pastors of the Church have not ceased to remind the faithful of the need to take part in the liturgical assembly. 'Leave everything on the Lord's Day', urges the third century text known as the *Didascalia*, 'and run diligently to your assembly, because it is your praise of God. Otherwise, what excuse will they make to God, those who do not come together on the Lord's Day to hear the word of life and feed on the divine nourishment which lasts forever?'"

-Pope St. John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, #46

“Even if in the earliest times it was not judged necessary to be prescriptive, the Church has not ceased to confirm this obligation of conscience, which rises from the inner need felt so strongly by the Christians of the first centuries. It was only later, faced with the half-heartedness or negligence of some, that the Church had to make explicit the duty to attend Sunday Mass: more often than not, this was done in the form of exhortation, but at times the Church had to resort to specific canonical precepts. This was the case in a number of local Councils from the fourth century onwards (as at the Council of Elvira of 300, which speaks not of an obligation but of penalties after three absences) and most especially from the sixth century onwards (as at the Council of Agde in 506). These decrees of local Councils led to a universal practice, the obligatory character of which was taken as something quite normal.

-DD, #47

“The precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: ‘On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass.’ The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day.’

-*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2180

“The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.”

-CCC, #2181

“How can we respond to those who say that it is of no use going to Mass, even on Sunday, because the important thing is to live well, to love our neighbor? It is true that the quality of Christian life is measured by the capacity to love, as Jesus said: ‘By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’; but how can we practice the Gospel without drawing the energy necessary to do so, one Sunday after another, from the inexhaustible source of the Eucharist? We do not go to Mass in order to give something to God, but to receive what we truly need from him. We are reminded of this by the Church’s prayer, which is

addressed to God in this way: 'although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation'. In conclusion, why do we go to Mass on Sundays? It is not enough to respond that it is a precept of the Church; this helps to preserve its value, but alone does not suffice. We Christians need to participate in Sunday Mass because only with Jesus' grace, with his living presence within us and among us, can we put his commandment into practice, and thus be his credible witnesses."

-Pope Francis, 12/13/17

"Conscious of this new vital principle which the Eucharist imparts to the Christian, the Synod Fathers reaffirmed the importance of the Sunday obligation for all the faithful, viewing it as a wellspring of authentic freedom enabling them to live each day in accordance with what they celebrated on "the Lord's Day." The life of faith is endangered when we lose the desire to share in the celebration of the Eucharist and its commemoration of the paschal victory. Participating in the Sunday liturgical assembly with all our brothers and sisters, with whom we form one body in Jesus Christ, is demanded by our Christian conscience and at the same time it forms that conscience."

-Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, #73

"To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day to be sanctified, is symptomatic of the loss of an authentic sense of Christian freedom, the freedom of the children of God. Sunday thus appears as the primordial holy day, when all believers, wherever they are found, can become heralds and guardians of the true meaning of time. It gives rise to the Christian meaning of life and a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life and death."

-SC, #73

"On the Lord's Day, then, it is fitting that Church groups should organize, around Sunday Mass, the activities of the Christian community: social gatherings, programmes for the faith formation of children, young people and adults, pilgrimages, charitable works, and different moments of prayer. For the sake of these important values – while recognizing that Saturday evening, beginning with First Vespers, is already a part of Sunday and a time when the Sunday obligation

can be fulfilled – we need to remember that it is Sunday itself that is meant to be kept holy, lest it end up as a day ‘empty of God.’”

-SC, #73