



Obligation: Law and Love

Social Media Posts

“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

“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...” -Pope St. John Paul II

“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.’” -*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

“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.” -*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

“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’.” -Pope Francis

“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

“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

“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.” –Pope Benedict XVI

“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.’” – Pope Benedict XVI

Bulletin Articles

Gratitude

We are obligated to participate in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. It might seem odd to be obligated to attend a celebration, so what is this all about? It may help to first think about where the obligation comes from. We are blessed with life, salvation, faith, gifts, and resources, and all these many blessings come from God. Out of gratitude, we come to the Eucharist - the word means thanksgiving - and with grateful hearts, we celebrate Christ’s presence among us. Our obligation, then, comes from deep within ourselves as we make Christ and the Eucharist the center of our lives. In Christ, we are offered life to the full. In the Eucharist, we are formed and nourished by Christ to live as his people. That is a reason to celebrate!

Love

Think about the things you do out of love for another. Parents get up in the middle of the night to feed or console their children. Adults care for their aging parents. Siblings and good friends stop everything in order to support their loved one through a difficult moment. We might say that we are obligated to do these things, not because someone tells us we must, but because we cannot imagine doing anything else. The obligation is our loving response which shows the importance of the person in our lives and our gratitude for him or her. This is a helpful way to think about our obligation to participate in Sunday Mass. We come to the Eucharistic feast, not only because the Church tells us we must, but as a response to the astounding love of God which is shown and shared through Jesus Christ.

House Rules

Let's be honest. There are moments when we may be inclined to stay home, lingering in leisure or distracted by the swirl of weekend activities rather than participating in Sunday Eucharist. We may rationalize our desire for creature comforts as we ignore our conscience's call to get ourselves to Mass. This is why the Church has established the Sunday obligation to attend Mass. Like parents who establish house rules in order to form a child to responsible adulthood, the Church establishes rules that lead us to spiritual maturity, which is expressed in willing participation in the Eucharist. The Sunday obligation may feel like an imposition from the outside, rather than what it is—a call for us to do what is best for us.

Participate and Celebrate

We often say we are "going" to Mass. When we truly celebrate the Eucharist, we do more than simply come to Mass. We are not to be passive spectators, but active participants. We listen, speak, sing, stand, sit, kneel, eat. And through our participation, we are changed. Pope Francis recently said, "The prayer of the Christian makes the sacramental presence of Jesus his or her own. What is external to us becomes part of us...The Mass is always celebrated, and not only by the priest who presides over it, but by all Christians who experience it. And the center is Christ! All of us, in the diversity of gifts and ministries, join in His action, because He, Christ, is the Protagonist of the liturgy." (February 2, 2021) Through our active participation in the Eucharist, particularly in receiving Christ's Body and Blood in Holy Communion, we become more like Christ and are strengthened to live as Christ's people in the world.