



# DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

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May 3, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

First, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to all the faithful of the diocese for bearing up patiently and prayerfully through a very challenging time in the history of our diocese. All of us have lost friends and loved ones due to COVID-19, and I continue to keep you and your families in my prayers.

Extraordinary times have been met with extraordinary measures, and I am most grateful for the truly creative ways our parishes have stayed connected with parishioners and provided access to the sacraments. With the Lord's help, we have seen our way through the pandemic, calling on the resourcefulness, courage and patience of our clergy, pastoral staff and parishioners, always with the goal in mind that our churches and other public gathering spaces are safe.

As we move forward, I announce that the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation for Catholics in the Diocese of St. Augustine will expire on the Vigil of Pentecost, Saturday, May 22, 2021.

There will remain some dispensations for the faithful who may find themselves in specific circumstances. Details about these particular dispensations are attached and can also be found on the diocesan website ([www.dosafl.org/coronavirus](http://www.dosafl.org/coronavirus)) and through diocesan social media channels. By announcing the change in dispensations now, parishes will have time to make the necessary adaptations to welcome more members of the faithful to the Sunday Masses.

One of the success stories of the pandemic has been the large number of people who have already been vaccinated against the disease. We expect many more in the weeks ahead. It is also remarkable that since June 2020, most Floridians have been able to safely go about their business, including dining in restaurants, shopping and connecting with family and friends. It would seem reasonable then to strive for the faithful's full and active participation once again at Mass. Since every parish is unique, pastors will need to make individual decisions about safely accommodating an increased number of attendees at Mass (for example, adding additional Masses or identifying a section of pews for those comfortable with less restrictive distancing between persons).

The use of face coverings should be continued until public health guidance suggests otherwise. With guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and other public health agencies, we have learned much about the disease and how it spreads. It appears that close contact with infected persons poses the most significant risk. Contagion from other sources has proven negligible and is preventable by good personal hygiene, social distancing, and face coverings.

The pandemic has meant a huge imposition on normal life. It will likely take more time before we return to some semblance of “normal.” As we do so, I would ask all the faithful to continue cooperating with our safety guidelines.

May the Lord continue to bless you richly throughout the Easter season and the months ahead.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+ v . r . Estevez*

Most Rev. Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.  
Bishop of St. Augustine

## Particular Dispensation Information

The general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (including the Vigil Mass at 4:00 p.m. or later on the previous day) is to be reinstated in the Diocese of St. Augustine, effective Saturday, May 22, 2021.

Considering the necessity of being physically present with our brothers and sisters at Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation for the Eucharist, Bishop Felipe J. Estévez asks Catholics to make a sincere judgment about whether or not these circumstances apply. If there is doubt or confusion, consult your pastor for clarity.

While the general dispensation is removed, there are specific instances where the dispensation will continue. One does not have an obligation to attend Mass on Sunday in the following circumstances:

- You are ill, or your health condition would be significantly compromised if you were to contract an infectious illness (i.e., you have underlying conditions or are in a high-risk category). Please use the dispensation and do not attend Mass.
- You exhibit flu-like symptoms. Please use the dispensation and do not attend Mass.
- You have good reason to think you might be asymptomatic of a contagious illness (e.g., you were in recent contact with someone who tested positive for an infectious disease such as COVID-19 or influenza). Please use the dispensation and do not attend Mass.
- You care for the sick, homebound, or infirmed.
- You are pregnant.
- Those 65 years of age or older (per the CDC's recommendation of high-risk individuals).
- You cannot attend Mass through no fault of your own (e.g., no Mass is offered, you are infirmed, or, while wanting to go, you are prevented for some reason you cannot control (e.g., your ride did not show up, the church was at capacity).
- These categories will be reviewed in due course and revised as needed.
- Those who do not attend Mass must still observe the Lord's Day and are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday, meditating on the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection; an excellent way to do this is through participating in a broadcast or live stream of the Sunday Mass.

*Effective May 22, 2021*