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Companions on the Journey

July 25, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week Archbishop Perez issued a letter announcing that on Sunday August 15th he was reinstating the Lord's Day responsibility for Catholics to attend and participate in the celebration of the Eucharist (The Mass) in fulfillment of our Catholic calling to give worship to God and to enter into communion with Our Lord Jesus Christ. It was back in March 2020 (almost 18 months ago) that all the bishops of this country promulgated a dispensation from the physical attendance at Mass on the Lord's Day. It was not the bishops' intention then or now to suggest that this was to undercut the Third Commandment: Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day. The bishops were placing an importance on the physical safety of the People of God. As individuals and as a nation there was much that was not yet known about the corona-virus but in "in an abundance of caution" the bishops acted to keep people safe in their homes for a time. No one knew it would last as long as it did.

But even though we were relieved of the responsibility to attend Mass, that did not mean that we had no responsibility to pray and to read the Scriptures, and to give God the worship of our hearts. It did not mean that going onto the livestreamed celebration of the Eucharist or not made no difference. The Ten Commandments came directly from Our God thirty-two hundred years ago. They have been around long enough to have witnessed all manner of historical events, tragedies, wars, insurrections and natural disasters. Giving God our loyalty and attention and asking for our daily bread and the Divine Assistance were never abrogated, nor can they be by us. On the contrary, they were encouraged despite what was going on in the world around us. Thank God for the possibility to watch and pray (via livestreaming) with our own priests in our own parishes during these months.

Many Catholics came back to Mass last June when the curfew was lifted. Others have come back after receiving the vaccination. Others when their children were safe. The Archbishop acknowledges in his letter that lifting the dispensation does not automatically mean that everyone is ready to return. It is clear that not everyone is ready. Some will probably never be able to return to Mass because of their health situations—and others because they live with these family members or have the care of them and cannot place themselves at risk. There is still some fear in the land and some reticence about the vaccines themselves.

There is complexity in the present situation still and there is much that remains unknown. On the other hand, it is time for families and individuals to begin to return to the practice of the faith. It is time for our people to come to Communion again, to receive the sacraments again, including Reconciliation. Take it slow and easy. Take a gradual approach if that is necessary. But do not allow yourselves to be in the grasp of fear. The Lord cares and the Lord watches over us all. Let us place our trust in Him who holds out to us the gift of life here and life everlasting. Without Our Lord we have very little hope. But with Christ all things are possible. Let us return—and let us give God our thanks from humble hearts.

Peace, Msgr. McHenry