



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE of
SPRINGFIELD-CAPE GIRARDEAU

Office of the Bishop

March 19, 2021

Feast of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

My Dear Friends in Christ,

Since March of 2020, the Church and the entire world has been on a road that no one has wanted to travel, yet travel we did! Along the way, we learned to navigate a pandemic. Along the way, we learned how to Zoom, Live-stream, social distance, and wear a mask. Along the way, we had to change our normal routines and learn to adapt, re-discovering the importance of the little things such as spending time with family, reaching out through a phone call, or sharing a meal at home!

The inability to attend Sunday Mass, along with the various restrictions, has been a hardship for so many. However, as our nation and the world begins the rollout of the various vaccines, we are hopefully seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. And that light is Christ, waiting for us in the Eucharist. In paragraph 1370 of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, we are told, “*In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the Cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ.*”

The Eucharist defines us as Catholics. The Eucharist is the “Blessed” of all the Sacraments. We refer to it as the “Bread of Angels” and the “Bread from Heaven.” “*Christ’s sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with His offering*” (CCC 1368). Such beautiful words describing the Mass highlight the suffering of not being able to participate in the liturgy in person, over the past year. Now is the time to return to Mass!

Currently, only three counties in our diocese have occupancy restrictions. More and more, the vaccine is being distributed. Currently, our COVID-19 wards at St. Francis Medical Center in Cape Girardeau, and Mercy Hospital in Springfield, have closed. Now is the time to return to Mass!

The parking lots of local sports complexes are full. Restaurants are open. People are traveling for spring break. Now is the time to return to Mass!

Therefore, the *Dispensation from the Obligation to Attend Holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation* is lifted as of Palm Sunday, beginning with the Vigil Mass, on March 27, 2021, with an exception for those with pre-existing health conditions, those who are care-givers to the homebound, or those with serious concerns, will have a *Particular Dispensation*.

Now is the time to return to Mass! I assure you that safety precautions will continue. I encourage everyone to wear a mask and to sanitize often. St. Ignatius of Antioch said it best, “*I hunger for the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ.*”

With my assurance of prayers during this joyous Easter Season, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Edward M. Rice
Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau