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Beloved Parishioners,

Ever since Christ's Resurrection, Christians have observed Sunday as the Lord's Day. Our Sunday Obligation is regulated by the 3rd Commandment and by the 1st Precept of the Church. God's Commandments are of divine institution, bind every human being, therefore, and can be dispensed from by no human being. The Precepts of the Church, however, are ecclesiastical law (of human origin), bind only Catholics, and can be dispensed from by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority.

Our obligation to keep the Sabbath holy is of divine institution, from which there can be no dispensation. It is one of the Ten Commandments. This 3rd Commandment requires that the Lord's Day be observed with justice towards Him, namely: by abstaining from servile labor and by rendering the Lord His due – which is our public worship. Christ has commanded how this is to be done, when instituting the Most Holy Eucharist: "*Do this in memory of me!*"

Your Sunday precept (to attend Mass) is of merely ecclesiastical law. It is one of the Five Precepts of the Church, binding all Catholics. Although Sunday Mass is a grave obligation (and therefore potential for mortal sin, when omitted), one is automatically excused when circumstances render it impossible or perilous to do so. The law does not require heroism.

Persons sick enough to stay home from other activities on a Sunday are also sick enough to stay away from Sunday Mass. Persons having completed their 59th year of life as well as those with underlying health conditions (such as hypertension, diabetes, heart or respiratory conditions, cancer, etc.) are automatically exempted from their Sunday Obligation in the current circumstances of a virus which disproportionately menaces such persons. They need no dispensation. Others may be dispensed from their Sunday Mass obligation by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority. On a case-by-case basis, this may always be given by your Pastor; and throughout the week, I have been doing so, when requested. Moreover, Archbishop Lucas, our Apostolic Administrator, may grant a general dispensation to ALL the Faithful.

Yesterday, in response to Nebraska Governor Ricketts' call to prohibit all large public gatherings, **Archbishop Lucas granted such a general dispensation to all Catholics in our Diocese of Lincoln.** Any Catholic, therefore, may freely discern whether they should attend Sunday Mass, without any risk of incurring grave sin. Indeed, if you suspect you may be contagious or particularly susceptible to contagion, you have a duty of charity to self-isolate at home.

There is no substitute for the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is the indispensable remedy for the world's ailments and you can be assured that your priests will continue to offer, without ceasing, the only acceptable sacrifice for our salvation – in all our usual masses scheduled at Cathedral. In particular, where possible, I will be offering the "Mass in Times of Pestilence".

However, those exempted or dispensed from the Sunday Mass are not, thereby, excused from demands of the 3rd Commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy. They must, therefore, render justice to the Lord on whom they depend utterly, through offering worship (albeit privately) on the Lord's Day. This may include observing our televised Mass for Shut-ins, meditating as a family on the Word of God (particularly, the Sunday readings: Exodus 7,3-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5,1-8 and John 4, 5-42), praying the Glorious Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary, keeping a Holy Hour at home and other pious devotions.

Governor Ricketts' prohibition on large public gatherings evades all non-essential social contact, and thus, delays or diminishes the rate of contagion. Whereas the supernatural help of God's grace – which He has seen fit to communicate through the Sacraments He instituted – is essential, your physical attendance is not. You can and should participate spiritually in the Work of God undertaken by the Church on your behalf, by making a daily Act of Spiritual Communion (see text below), by uniting your intentions with the sacrifice to the Father of His beloved Son, the irresistible offering which saves the world.

It is also a Precept of the Church that Catholics must receive communion once a year. They therefore also have the right to receive Communion (when properly disposed) once a year. One is not obliged – nor does one have the right – to receive communion weekly. For this reason, we have suspended bringing routine communion to the elderly or infirm, also as a duty of charity towards them, who find themselves in the highest risk category.

Those of you who require the ministrations of a priest, especially in danger of death, will always have the Sacraments brought to you most willingly. Those, also, who are without family or friends able to check in on them at this time may reach out to Reach Cathedral at cathedralchurchdirectory@gmail.com to alert us to any such persons in need.

Cathedral's bells – which are consecrated Sacramentals bearing the power of an exorcism – will continue to ring out to dispel the malice of the enemy and consecrate the sacred environs. Each day, I walk in private Eucharistic Procession around our Cathedral and its school with the Blessed Sacrament, confiding to the Lord the protection of all our parishioners.

At times like these, we realize the genius of the Roman Rite, which has endured through 20 centuries' worth of plagues and pestilences. Its collective wisdom protects us against so much. Priests are set-apart from the people, in the sanctuary. They maintain liturgical 'digits' (fingers together) as much to protect the safety of the Sacrament as to protect your safety. This way, you know, that you receive Our Lord from priestly fingers that have touched nothing other than Our Lord and are uncontaminated since their washing. For this reason, also, the chalice of sacrifice is not shared: only the priest offering the sacrifice needs to consume it for the sacrifice to be consummated. In the smallest fragment of the host or the tiniest drop of the chalice is contained in its fullness the whole Body and Blood, Soul and divinity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Since the sign of peace is optional, we have for a long time already omitted it. The offertory procession also optional, so for the time being we will not have an offertory procession. We will also suspend the children's collection at the 9 and 11 am Sunday Masses. Ushers will open and close church doors at Sunday Masses and sanitize their handles after every Mass. All our church surfaces are regularly sanitized with Clorox by our devoted volunteers.

Holy Communion on the tongue is no less sanitary than in the hands – indeed, when properly administered, it is safer than in the hands (for it more successfully avoids all contact with any part of the person) – but I recognize that not all our communion ministers are equally adept at administering it. So, if you are in any doubt, feel free to receive communion in the manner you wish – this is your right.

All non-essential social contact is, for now, to be avoided. Fish Frys, CCD and RCIA classes, marriage/baptism prep, choir and other meetings are suspended. Our school is closed to the public, as is our Parish Office – though the staff is on duty to attend to your needs telephonically or via e-mail.

School may be out but we still have to make payroll (\$150,000) and payments to Pius (\$30,000). Another Precept of the Church, binding on all Catholics, is the duty to contribute to the support of the Mission of the Church (in other words: tithing). Dispensation from your Sunday obligation is not a dispensation from your duty of support. Please make a concerted effort to send your contributions per mail, by check or through electronic tithing during these difficult times – or our parish will face a greater threat than this virus.

Though it seems we live in fearsome times, we live at the very time God had in mind for us. Therefore, He does not leave us helpless. One of the most repeated phrases in Scripture is “*be not afraid!*” Our parishioners have no need to be fearful or to panic, for we have on our side a power greater than any other. We are possessed of Our Lord’s promise that hell itself will not prevail against His Church – so no sickness or plague is any obstacle to God. Let us face this Lenten trial with the serene peace and confident hope of those who are assured of the Victory won in Christ’s Resurrection.

Yours devotedly in the Lord,

Father Justin Wylie
Rector, Cathedral Parish & School

An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,

I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.