

Importance of Sunday Mass

Let's begin by reminding ourselves of why Sunday Mass is so important. Firstly, setting aside one day of the week for worship is a command of Almighty God himself, both in the Old and the New Testament.

In the Book of Exodus God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, which all those who wish to be blessed by him must follow. The Third Commandment is 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy' (*Ex 20:8*). In the Old Testament the Jewish people understood the Sabbath to be the seventh day of the week, Saturday, the day on which, according to the Book of Genesis, God rested after having created the world.



Day of the Resurrection

For Christians, however, the holiest day of the week is Sunday, the first day, the day on which Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Since the very earliest days of the Church, Christians have come together every Sunday to celebrate Christ's Resurrection. In doing so, they know that Christ the Lord is present among them, according to his own words: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (*Matthew 18:20*).

Equally, ever since the earliest times, the celebration of the Eucharist has formed part of Christian Sunday worship. How could it be otherwise? After all, the command to celebrate the Eucharist, or Mass, was given by Jesus himself at the Last Supper: 'Do this in memory of me'. There can be no more fitting occasion to fulfil this command than on Sunday, the day of Resurrection and new life. After all, at every Mass, Christ's saving sacrifice is made present – we call to mind his Resurrection and glorious Ascension. Thus, when we share in the Sunday Mass, we also participate sacramentally in the very events we are commemorating.

To sum up, our participation in Sunday Mass is a non-negotiable part of being a Catholic. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes this clear: 'The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice' (*CCC 2181*). To treat Sunday like any other day, or to deliberately absent ourselves from Mass, is simply never acceptable.



Can I never miss Sunday Mass?

Certainly to miss Mass on Sunday (or indeed, on a Holy Day of Obligation) is a serious matter. The *Catechism* teaches us: 'On Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass', and again 'Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin' (*CCC 2180, 2181*). The key word here, obviously, is 'deliberately'. The Church does recognise that sometimes Catholics may be unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own.

Exceptions

What circumstances, then, might justify missing a Sunday Mass? The *Catechism* speaks of the faithful being 'excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants)' (*CCC 2181*).

1 Illness: This is perhaps the most obvious and certainly understandable reason for missing Sunday Mass. Someone in hospital, or housebound, clearly has no obligation to go to church (and if they would worsen their condition by trying to do so, they should not make the attempt). Someone with a contagious disease would similarly be better off at home or in hospital.



2 Carers: Likewise, those caring for the sick have a good reason to be absent from Mass. The *Catechism* mentions the care of infants and small children – those looking after the frail and elderly would be in a similar position. People in any of these categories would not commit a sin by missing Sunday Mass.

3 Other Serious Reasons: Moreover, there can be times when attending Mass on Sunday is simply a physical impossibility. In some countries (including much of the Middle East) Catholic churches are forbidden. Even travelling nearer to home, or in our own country, we may experience rare cases where we find ourselves very far from a Catholic church, and in this situation we would be excused our Sunday obligation. But the reason for our absence always needs to be serious.

Missing Sunday Mass because we fancy a day at the beach or to go to a barbecue – preferring to spend the time playing sports (or worse, encouraging our children to miss Mass on Sundays in order to play sports) – deciding to skip our obligation simply because we are on holiday, despite having a Catholic church within easy reach – all these excuses are unworthy and would suggest we have not fully understood what it means to be Catholic, nor the great treasure which is the Eucharist.

When unable to attend for a serious reason.

The *Catechism* suggests that in cases such as this we 'engage in prayer for an appropriate amount of time personally or in a family' (CCC 2183). The 'appropriate amount of time' will vary according to circumstances, but it should be significant. It would certainly be fitting, if possible, to read the Scriptures which would be used at the Mass we are missing, and perhaps the other prayers of the Mass as well. We could also pray the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary, or use any other devotion which will call to mind Christ's Resurrection.



Prayer for Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since at this moment I cannot receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as being already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

Such an act of Spiritual Communion can also be used at Mass by those unable to receive Communion sacramentally – for example, non-Catholic visitors, or Catholics who are for whatever reason, unable to receive Communion.

Spiritual Communion

Finally, it is also a good practice, much encouraged by the Church, to make a "Spiritual Communion" when we are unable to receive Holy Communion sacramentally. A Spiritual Communion is simply the heartfelt desire to be united with Christ, even though we are unable to receive him in the Blessed Sacrament. This desire for Christ draws us closer to him, for as St Thomas Aquinas teaches: 'The effects of a sacrament can be received by desire'. We do not need any particular words in making a Spiritual Communion, but the saints have left us many examples which we can make our own. Here is a widely used version composed by St Alphonsus Liguori:

For more information

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How to Pray, (LF11)

How to Pray the Rosary, (LF31)

What Happens at Mass? (LF3)

What is Eucharistic Adoration? (LF15)

Who can receive Communion? (LF7)

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What if I can't get to Sunday Mass?



Making a Spiritual Communion

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