

# Cardinal Dinardo calls Catholics back to Mass in the New Year

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We have entered the season of Christmas, the time of the Church year when we focus our meditations and prayers on the great gift of the Incarnation, God taking on human flesh for our redemption. This is a season of hope, a season when we hold fast to the reality that God is faithful.

For nearly two years now, we have lived through the difficulties of the coronavirus pandemic. At the outset of the pandemic, I enacted several protocols for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy in order to mitigate against the spread of COVID-19 at our parish churches. Over time, I have adjusted some protocols or given discretion for local pastors to use their best judgment.

In the spring of 2020, I decreed a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. I did so in order to instill peace of mind among all the faithful, especially those who would sincerely desire to fulfill their Mass obligations while also harboring serious concerns for contracting the coronavirus.

Just as I have made changes to other protocols, I now announce a change for the dispensation from the Sunday and Holy Day Mass obligation. Effective Jan. 2, 2022, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, this dispensation is removed for all Catholics within the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. The faithful should fulfill their Sunday and Holy Day obligations joyfully and conscientiously.

At the same time, I remind everyone that, from the Church's law itself, the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation is not morally binding for those who find it impossible to attend Mass, e.g., due to illness, advanced age, caring for a sick person, or being at high-risk for contracting COVID-19 (cf. Canon, 1248). These persons should fulfill their obligations at home through some act of prayer or meditation upon the sacred scriptures for the Mass of the day.

When there was great uncertainty about the manner of transmitting COVID-19, I suspended the use of holy water in our churches. I have recently directed pastors to resume the use of holy water beginning on Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022.

May the peace that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and always.