

# CONCERNING SUNDAY MASS OBLIGATION AND DAILY MASS: ITS CANONICAL AND PASTORAL ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRAK

“Misa Kudus atau Ekaristi Kudus” menduduki peranan penting dalam kehidupan umat beriman Katolik. Dalam Misa, bukan pertama-tama apa yang kita berikan kepada Tuhan, melainkan apa yang Tuhan berikan atau anugerahkan kepada kita. Dan, sungguh luar biasa bahwa yang diberikan oleh Yesus adalah Tubuh dan Darah-Nya sendiri, yang dicurahkan kepada kita yang hadir dalam Ekaristi sebagai kekuatan rohani yang tak terkira nilainya. Khususnya dalam Misa hari Minggu, semua umat berkumpul untuk memuji Allah dan mendapatkan rahmat pengudusan dari Allah. Karena itu, kehadiran umat dalam Misa Kudus pada hari Minggu merupakan sebuah kewajiban seperti yang tertuang dalam sepuluh perintah Allah dan lima perintah Gereja.

## KATA-KATA KUNCI:

*Mass, Canonical, Pastoral*

## Introduction

The Holy Eucharist is “the heart and summit of ecclesial life. It is the sum total of our faith.”<sup>1</sup> It is the fountain that pours abundant graces on the faithful. It is the highest form of all the prayers. It is the most august of all the sacraments in which Christ our Lord Jesus is contained, offered, and received, thus, the Church continually lives, grows and becomes stronger in the test of time.<sup>2</sup> As St. Thomas would say and I quote: “*The Eucharist is an outstanding work of God. It is a work hidden in the intellect and is quiet beyond understanding. It is a true mystery; often referred to simply as the Mystery par excellence.*”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Eucharist is the pinnacle and apex of all kinds of worship and is the source of our Christian faith. In this paper, the researcher would delve his study on the two topics; namely, concerning the Sunday mass obligation and on daily mass.

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<sup>1</sup> “*Catechism of the Catholic Church*”, Doubleday, USA 1995, n. 1324.

<sup>2</sup>cf. CIC 1983, Canon 897.

<sup>3</sup>“*Bachelor in Sacred Theology Reviewer*”, vol.1, 2004 ed., p. 168.

## 1. Concerning the Sunday Mass Obligation

When I was a small boy, my mother would always oblige us to attend Mass every Sunday because she told us that it is our duty to do so being a Catholic. She would even wake us very early in the morning and cut our sleeping hours in the weekend to require us to go to Mass. Since I was an obedient boy that time as well as my other siblings, we accompanied her in the Church without understanding at all the very reason why we have to attend Sunday Masses. Why do Catholics need to attend Sunday Mass? Where does it come from? What do canonical provisions say about it?

### 1.1. A Brief Historical Background of the Sunday Mass Obligation

There were no written accounts in the history of the church evidently pointing out the obligation of the faithful to attend Sunday Masses. All throughout those years, the church came to consider its assembling on Sunday for eucharist as normative and binding, but it remained an unwritten custom rather than a written law. The first time the Sunday Mass obligation was formally instituted in universal law was in the *Code of Canon Law* of 1917.<sup>4</sup>

The earliest positive legislation on Sunday Mass observance came from local councils. In the year 506, in the Council of Agde, it was decreed there that the faithful should not leave the Sunday Eucharist before the blessing of the priest. They required that on the Lord's Day, the laity shall be obliged to be present during the whole celebration of the Mass, so that the people will not presume to go out of church before the priest has given the Benediction. However, this decree did not establish a Sunday precept but insisted that the people stay for the entire Mass. From the seventh century onwards, numerous local councils treated matters related to Sunday Mass attendance. This body of legislation shows that, by this period, Christians in many local churches were obliged by law to assist at Sunday Mass unless they had a legitimate excuse to be absent.<sup>5</sup>

During the Middle Ages, the Sunday Mass obligation was supported by ecclesiastical or civil sanctions, including a variety of corporal punishments and fines. The laws were binding only in the localities for which they were enacted, not for the universal church. From the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, various local councils enacted legislation requiring that the Sunday Mass obligation be fulfilled only in one's parish church. These laws were prompted by the influence of the mendicant orders, which were attracting people away from the secular clergy on Sundays. Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) lent support to the secular clergy

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<sup>4</sup>cf. John M. Huels, *“More Disputed Questions the Liturgy”*, Liturgy Training Publications, USA 1996, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-63.

by forbidding the friars to tell the faithful that they were not bound to attend Mass on Sundays in their parishes.<sup>6</sup>

The Council of Trent did not enact binding legislation on this matter but simply decreed that local ordinaries should admonish the faithful to go to their parish church frequently, at least on Sundays and on principal feast days. From the end of the sixteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century, custom dictated that the Sunday Mass obligation could be fulfilled at any church, although it was debated whether the obligation could be satisfied in a private oratory by those who did not have an indult. The Code of Canon Law of 1917 for the first time gathered this tradition into a universal law. In the period before Vatican was characterized by an intense legalism and casuistry. A deliberate violation of any church law was considered sinful, either mortally or venially, depending on the importance of the law that was broken. The Sunday Mass obligation, which was held to be a merely ecclesiastical and not a divine law, was nevertheless considered to be binding under pain of mortal sin.<sup>7</sup>

The present Code continues this tradition by enacting some provisions that Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to attend Mass. This legislation has normally been viewed as entailing a grave obligation and vital for the Christian life.

## **1.2. Canonical Provisions on the Sunday Mass Obligation**

The Code of Canon Law obliges all Catholics who are at least seven years of age and have the use of reason to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist every Sunday and holy day of obligation, and to refrain from unnecessary, arduous work on these days. Even Protestants and Eastern non-Catholics, called heretics and schismatics, were legally bound to attend Mass each Sunday and holy day in a Catholic rite.

*Can. 1246 §1 stipulates that “Sunday, on which by apostolic tradition the paschal mystery is celebrated, is to be observed in the universal Church as the primary holyday of obligation.”*

This canon prescribes for the universal Church those specific days through the year which the faithful are obliged to devote in a special manner to the honor and worship of God. It paves us to acknowledge both the dependence of every creature upon its Creator and the grateful praise which is due for the gift of salvation, earned by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Among those days is every Sunday by a tradition handed down from the apostles, which took its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid. p.63.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

seventh day, which day is appropriately called the Lord's Day or Sunday, the original feast day, the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year.

*Can. 1247 also specified that “on Sundays and other holydays of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass. They are also to abstain from such work or business that would inhibit the worship to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the due relaxation of mind and body.”*

In this context of holydays, the obligation to observe Sundays and the other days specified in Can. 1246 is a twofold one. There are two points to be considered with regard to the obligation of the faithful to those specified days. The first one is to assist at the Mass which entails to be present and to participate in the celebration of the sacrifice which represents the institution of the Eucharist, with all its implications of Christ's death and resurrection. The second one is to abstain from such work or business that would inhibit the worship to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the due relaxation of mind and body. In the present milieu, modern commercial and economic pressures may not lie easily with this directive, but this canon is a clear call to Christ's faithful to assert their fundamental belief in the spiritual values of the Gospel of Christ, values which may well be out of accord with the current trend towards material possessions as some kind of ultimate value.

*Can. 1248 § 1 The obligation of participating in the Mass is satisfied by one who assists at Mass wherever it is celebrated in a catholic rite, either on the holyday itself or on the evening of the previous day.*

*§2 If it is impossible to participate in a eucharistic celebration, either because no sacred minister is available or for some other grave reason, the faithful are strongly recommended to take part in a liturgy of the Word, if there be such in the parish church or some other sacred place, which is celebrated in accordance with the provisions laid down by the diocesan Bishop; or to spend an appropriate time in prayer, whether personally or as a family or, as occasion presents, in a group of families.*

The obligation of participating in the Mass is satisfied (§ 1):

(a) wherever Mass is celebrated in the catholic rite

- there is no restriction whatever in respect of the place in which the Mass may be celebrated

- on a Sunday or holyday of obligation what of a catholic who may for a good reason -e.g. because of a public office, of a family relationship, of friendship, even of a wish to be better informed -attends Mass in an Orthodox Church on a Sunday or holyday of obligation? It is certainly a tenable view that, in accordance with the *Directory concerning Ecumenical Matters* of 1967, such a catholic will thereby have satisfied the obligation of assisting at Mass as determined by this canon.

b) either on the holyday itself or on the evening of the previous day

-the holyday itself clearly means from the midnight which begins the day to the midnight which closes it;

-what is 'the evening of the previous day'? Despite the view of some commentators that this should be interpreted as beginning only at 1400 hours (2 pm) on that day;' some also would assert that evening of the previous day begins at midday (12 noon) on that day itself. In some dioceses, there is a local regulation to the effect that the so-called vigil or anticipated Mass may not be celebrated before, say, 5 pm or 6 pm. This is normally for pastoral reasons, e.g. to facilitate weddings or funerals in parish or other churches. Those regulations do not in any way concern the time prescribed for fulfilling the obligation to assist at Mass. Thus, for example, if in such a diocese, a person were to attend a nuptial Mass in the early afternoon on a Saturday, that person would thereby have fulfilled the obligation of §1 of this canons. When a vigil Mass properly so called is in fact celebrated on the evening of the previous day, it is to be the Mass liturgically proper to the following day, implying a homily, prayers of the faithful, etc. It is to be noted, however, that when a Sunday and another holyday of obligation occur on two successive days, the assistance at no more than an evening Mass on the first of two such days does not fulfill the dual obligation.

In the paragraph 2 of this same canon does not state canonical obligation, but rather a strong recommendation that, if by reason of the circumstances described it is impossible to assist at Mass. The faithful would then:

-either take part in a liturgy of the Word, to be held in accordance with the directives of the diocesan Bishop;

-or spend some time in prayer, personal, and family.

### 1.3. Provisions from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

In number 2181, it stated that *“the Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason for instance, illness, the care of infants or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.”* This provision obliges the faithful to observe Sunday Mass because if one will deliberately not do it incurs a grave sin.

In number 2185, it reiterated that *“on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body. Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest. The faithful should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life, and health.”* This is reminder to the Catholics that they must give to God Sunday, as the day of rest with the Lord.

In number 2187, it asserted that *“sanctifying Sundays and holy days requires a common effort. Every Christian should avoid making unnecessary demands on others that would hinder them from observing the Lord's Day. Traditional activities [sport, restaurants etc.] and social necessities [public services etc.] require some people to work on Sundays, but everyone should still take care to set aside sufficient time for leisure. With temperance and charity the faithful will see to it that they avoid the excesses and violence sometimes associated with popular leisure activities. In spite of economic constraints, public authorities should ensure citizens a time intended for rest and divine worship. Employers have a similar obligation toward their employees.”* To sanctify the day of the Lord, one must then avoid doing stuffs that are not connected for the sustenance of one's spiritual life. God gave us 6 days of the week to do these things and only a day for him, a day to spend our time with Him.

### 1.4. Local Legislation for the Catholics in the Philippines

The Lord's Day or Sunday is the original feast day and it should be proposed to the faithful and taught to them so that it may in fact become a day of joy and of freedom from work.<sup>8</sup> The parish priest has the obligation to apply the Misa pro Populo for his parishioners on Sundays and holidays as stated, in accord with canon 534, 2. On Sundays and holidays of obligation, the

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<sup>8</sup>Florencio I. Testera, OP., *“Canon Law Digest of the Philippine Catholic Church,”* A Text and Commentary, (Third Edition). UST Printing Press, University of Santo Tomas: Manila 1995, p. 80.

faithful are bound to participate in the mass and to abstain from labor and business concerns which impede the worship to be rendered to God and the joy and leisure necessary for the celebration (c.1247).

## **1.5. Sample Cases: Missing Sunday Mass**

### **1.5.1. Is missing Sunday Mass a mortal sin?**

*In the seminary in the province, my formator would always remind us to attend Mass on Sunday. Failure to do such act is tantamount to commit a mortal sin. One day, I failed to attend Mass because I woke up very late. In the parish that time, the second Mass in the morning was already the last Mass. Did I commit a mortal sin?*

The requirement to attend Mass on Sunday as stated in canons 1246 - 48 is a serious obligation for all Catholics. A Catholic who is not impeded by grave reasons decides not to attend Sunday mass commits mortal sin. This is the very teaching of the catechism of the Catholic Church although the code of canon law is silent about it.

For an act to be a mortal sin, these three conditions must be present; namely, grave matter, full knowledge and full consent. In case I mentioned above, I have no full knowledge and full consent of it because it is not my fault to miss the Sunday Mass. Thus, that instance is not a mortal sin. However, in some cases when a person deliberately misses Sunday mass knowing the consequences of his actions as well as he decides to do it with his full volition and knowledge, from that case, he commits mortal sin as stated in CCC 2181 which states that “*those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.*”

### **1.5.2. On Anticipated Mass**

*One time, my friend invited me to accompany her to attend anticipated mass that Saturday because she might not be able to go on Sunday. This is because that night, she will go to the bar with friends and will just spend her Sunday in sleeping. Is this kind of practice concerning the Sunday obligation considerable?*

Fulfilling Sunday obligation by attending Mass on the Saturday anticipated Mass is pastorally acceptable already due to valid reasons. At the first glimpse, my friend does not violate any provisions in the code of canon law. In fact, she even abstained herself from working the whole Sunday by just sleeping the whole day. But, as we try to look deeply to it, to the spirit of the law, Sunday should be spend for the Lord, not only for the relaxation of the body but more so of the soul. This act of hers would not deepen her relationship with God as well as her spiritual

life. If she cannot really resist not to party at all, maybe she can go out on Friday night so that she will have ample time to reflect, to spend that day with God during Sunday. As CCC 2186 would say that *“Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life.”*

## 2. Concerning Daily Mass

Last Christmas vacation, I met seminarians from our minor seminary seeking the signature of a presider of the mass of the day. This mini-notebook according to them will be inspected by their formator to check if they are attending daily mass in the parish or not. I too before taking up theology am confused whether failing to attend during weekdays is a sin or not. Is attending daily mass an obligation? What is the historical development of this thing? Is it really a sin if one fails to attend it? What do the code of canon law and catechism of the church say about it?

### 2.1. Brief History on the Daily Mass

In Acts 2: 42, it states and I quote: *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and the prayers... Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts.”* This biblical account clearly affirms that in the New Testament, after the death of Jesus, the apostles and those people who believe in Christ was celebrating everyday the fellowship by breaking the bread to be shared for all. This simply means then that daily means from that then on sprouted to strengthen their relationship with Christ as well as their brotherly bonding in the community.

Mass was not said more than once a day before the Middle Ages – and it still was a High Mass. In the ninth century, owing largely to the monastic custom of saying a definite number of Masses for the deceased members, the multiplication of Masses had progressed. This led to the abridged service we call Low Mass, meaning to say, Mass without a choir, ministers, and assistance. Because of that, new Missals had to be arranged with the full text of all parts of the Mass, which were not contained in the Sacramentaries, because the lessons and antiphons were not recited or sung by the celebrant. The ceremonies, on the other hand, were simplified, some were left out altogether, and everything was said in a speaking voice. No definite date can be assigned for this innovation.

Requiem Masses are observed in the second centuries. During the persecutions, they were celebrated in the cemetery chapels, but were rather of a private character, and repeated on the days when the office was said. The so-called Gregorian Masses do not form part of the public liturgy.

However, there was a mention regarding the custom of saying three Masses on all Soul's Day. This custom is of Spanish origin, and was extended to the universal church by Pope Benedict XV on August 10, 1915. This is a privilege not an obligation, just like saying three Masses on Christmas Day.

In the middle ages, the monks as well as religious men and women ardently emulated this practice which inspired faithful to tread in their path. This kind of practice continues to be alive nowadays in the churches, in the cloisters, seminaries, and various places of worship to nurture more their spiritual hunger for the body of Christ and to satisfy their thirst for the blood of our Lord Jesus.

## 2.2. Canonical Provisions on the Daily Mass

The code of canon law stipulated various provisions concerning daily mass. First, in canon 246, par. 1, it states that *"the celebration of the Eucharist is to be the centre of the whole life of the seminary, so that the students, participating in the very charity of Christ, may daily draw strength of soul for their apostolic labor and for their spiritual life particularly from this riches of sources."* This canon is intended for formation of the future clerics. Hence, the daily attendance at Mass be an essential feature of every seminarian's formation except in circumstances, such as illness, or the like.

Second, in canon 276, par. 2, section 2 concerning clerics, it says that *"they are to nourish their spiritual life at the two-fold table of the sacred scripture and the Eucharist; priests are therefore earnestly invited to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice daily, and the deacons to participate daily in the offering."* This entails their obligation to pursue holiness and nurture their spiritual life and strengthen their vocation and heir answer to God by their daily sustenance of the Holy Eucharist.

Third, in canon 904, it exclaims that *"remembering always that in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice the work of redemption is continually being carried out, priests are to celebrate frequently. Indeed, daily celebration is earnestly recommended, because, even if it should not be possible to have the faithful present, it is the action of Christ and of the Church in which priests fulfill their principal role."* Under the 1917 Code at canon 805, a priest was obliged to say Mass only several times a year, although Bishops and religious Superiors were to see to it that they celebrated at least every Sunday and holyday of obligation. However, in the present code, it does not lay down a minimum. It only recommends daily celebration, as did Vatican II, precisely because in celebrating Mass, a priest is fulfilling his principal function. In order then to

follow it, a priest is allowed to override the rule of Can. 906 requiring the participation of at least one of the faithful at Mass.

Fourth, in canon 663, par. 2, it states that *“each day the members are to make every effort to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice, receive the most holy body of Christ and adore the Lord Himself present in the sacrament.”* That is the Eucharist must have a central place in the spiritual life of all religious. They are urged to participate in the Mass daily, to receive Holy Communion, and to spend some time in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Lastly, in canon 214, it affirms that *“Christ’s faithful have the right to worship God according to the provisions of their own rite approved by the lawful pastors of the church; they have also the right to follow their own form of spiritual life, provided it is in accord with Church teaching.”* And one way to do this is to attend mass daily which could surely nourish their spirituality.

### **2.3. Vatican II on the “*Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery*” (25 May 1967)**

In this instruction particularly in article 29, it pronounces that *“the faithful should be invited to go to mass frequently on weekdays, to go even daily in fact. This is particularly recommended on those weekdays which should be celebrated with special case, above all in Lent and Advent, as also on lesser feasts of the Lord and on certain feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary or of saints who are particularly venerated in the universal or local Church.”* The term used is “invited”, not obliged. Because of that, the faithful are not obliged to attend daily mass but only highly encouraged and invited to partake the body and blood of our Lord daily.

### **2.4. Sample Case: cancellation of Daily Mass**

*There are some parish priests in our place who would not say daily mass at all if there are only few parishioners who are present. Is this thing okay and justifiable?*

It is not okay and not as well justifiable not to say daily mass because of constraint of the number of people. As Canon 904 would affirm *“priests are to celebrate frequently. Indeed, daily celebration is earnestly recommended even if it should not be possible to have the faithful present because it is an action of Christ and of the Church in which priests fulfill their principal role.”* Thus, the parish priests or any priest for that matter cannot cancel any mass schedule due to few parishioners that are attending in the said mass. He is to celebrate mass daily with or without the people.

## Conclusion

Sunday obligation and daily mass are two complex realities and issues that are confusing the faithful as well as priests from time to time. In Sunday Mass obligation, it is indeed obligatory to attend it and one can commit a grave if one deliberately fails to do it. As it is written in the Ten Commandments, that we should make holy the Sabbath day. In the case of daily mass, it is not an obligatory to the faithful. They are highly encouraged to attend it to strengthen more their relationship with God. In the case of seminarians, clerics, and religious, they are bound by canon law to attend daily the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is their duty to do it but canon law is silent on the offense that will be given if one omits to do it. The first one is our grave duty and the second one is on the devotional practices. All in all, these two topics have a common goal, that is, to commemorate the Paschal Mystery of Christ day by day in our life and to foster a kind of relationship with God by accepting Him and His body and blood in the Holy Eucharist, particularly in the Holy Communion.

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