

CLIFF NOTES

by Fr. Clifford Smith

Missing Mass on Sunday

What is our Sunday Obligation?

Deliberately missing Mass on a Sunday or Holy Days of Obligation is a serious sin because it breaks the Third Commandment. *"See that you keep my sabbath because it is a sign between you and me and your generation, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctify you"* (Deut.5:12) It is not a 'meaningless rule imposed by the Catholic Church' ... it is a Commandment of God. It establishes the Sabbath as a day of physical rest and devotion to God. All Christians, including Catholics, have an obligation to observe the Sabbath by attending Sunday Services, and avoiding unnecessary work. This does not include hobbies and activities that you really enjoy.

Who Says So?

According to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**:

2181: *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 example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin."*

Also, the **Code of Canon Law** it states:

1246: *The Lord's Day, on which the paschal mystery is celebrated, is by apostolic tradition to be observed in the universal Church as the primary holy day of obligation. In the same way the following holydays are to be observed ... normally the Birth of Jesus Christ (Dec. 25), the feast of Mary the Mother of God (Jan. 1), the Ascension of Christ (40 Days after Easter), the feast of Saint Joseph (May 1), the Body and Blood of Christ, the Assumption (Aug. 15), the feast of All Saint's (Nov. 1), and the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8)*

1247: *On Sundays and other holydays of obligation, the faithful are obliged to assist [attend] at 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.*

When might it Not a Sin?

Missing mass is not a sin when it is clearly impossible to get to Mass. There is a not list of acceptable 'excuses' but because missing Mass in some circumstances is not a deliberate disobedience of the commandment of God. Obviously serious circumstances may arise which excuse a person from attending Mass: a true emergency at home; a person who is so sick and may pose a threat to the health of others (*there is no virtue in further hurting one's own health plus infecting everyone else in the church.*) Or, in the case of an ice storm, a person must prudently judge whether one can safely travel to Mass without seriously risking his own life or the lives of the others, or cannot find a Mass to attend without real burden. A pastor can dispense a person from the obligation to attend Mass for a serious reason. When such serious circumstances arise which prevent a person from being at Mass, one should definitely take time to pray, perhaps reading the prayers and readings of the Mass in a Missal, or even watching the Mass on television and at least participate in spirit. Keep in mind when such serious circumstances arise, a person does not commit mortal sin for missing Mass.

When a person intentionally "skips Mass," to go shopping, catch-up on work, sleep a few extra hours, attend a social event, or not interrupt a vacation, the person is allowing something to take the place of God or the Holy Eucharist. Such behavior really is turning one's back on God and is committing a mortal sin. God must come first in our lives. On Sunday, our primary duty is to worship God at Mass as a Church and to be nourished with His grace.

**PARENTS HAVE A SACRED OBLIGATION TO SEE THAT
THEIR CHILDREN GO TO MASS EVERY SUNDAYS AND ON HOLY DAYS
AND SIN BY THEIR FAILURE.**