



## MEMORANDUM

To: All Bishops

From: Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Chairman, Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance

Date: October 10, 2024

Subject: Response from the Dicastery for Legislative Texts Regarding the Observance of Holy Days of Obligation

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Your Eminence / Your Excellency,

This year, December 8<sup>th</sup> is the Second Sunday of Advent. As a result, the observance of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Patronal Feast Day of the United States of America, will be transferred to Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>. In previous years when December 8<sup>th</sup> has fallen on a Sunday, it was the practice in our country to indicate that the obligation to attend Mass does not transfer with the liturgical observance.

Earlier this year, in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance, I wrote to the Dicastery for Legislative Texts to seek clarification on this matter. The question arose, in part, from the fact that December 8<sup>th</sup> is not included in the [USCCB's complementary norm to canon 1246 CIC](#), which abrogates the precept to attend Mass when other holy days observed in the United States fall on a Saturday or Monday.

In response to my inquiry, I received the attached response (Prot. N. 18329/2024) signed by His Excellency Filippo Iannone, O.Carm., Prefect of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, and His Excellency Juan Ignacio Arrieta, Secretary. As you will read, their response states that the feast "*must be observed as a day of obligation on the day to which it is transferred.*" At the same time, the Officials rightly recall canonical principles that can be applied when attendance at Mass on the day of obligation is impossible for a legitimate reason.

I would be grateful if you would share this information with your presbyterate. Since the Dicastery's response will effect a change in our usual practice, sufficient time will be needed to provide appropriate explanations to the Catholic faithful.

Attachment



DICASTERIUM  
DE LEGUM TEXTIBUS

Vatican City, 04 September 2024

Prot. N. 18329/2024

Your Excellency,


In a letter dated July 5, in your capacity as the President of the Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, you asked this Dicastery the following question: «If a Holy Day of Obligation in the Advent, Lent or Easter season falls on a Sunday and the Solemnity is transferred to Monday, does the obligation to attend Mass still apply?». »


We will only give a few clarifications below since the canonical norms relating to the subject are clear. As a matter of fact, can. 1246, § 1, establishes the feasts that must be observed as days of obligation. The canon does not provide for exceptions. For those reasons, those feasts are always days of obligation, and so, even when the aforementioned transfer of the feast occurs. Therefore, in that year, the feast must be observed as a day of obligation on the day to which it is transferred. Additionally, the purpose of the § 1 of the above-mentioned canon is to indicate that Sunday and the other feasts listed are days of obligation (cf. «*servanda est*» and «*servari debent*»).

It is, however, important to keep in mind that canon law explicitly addresses the situation in which a grave cause renders it impossible to attend Holy Mass (cf. can. 1248, § 2), and, since no one is bound to the impossible, a dispensation is not even needed in those situations. It is in this sense that n. 2181 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* states that «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» (for a just cause). In n. 2185 of the *CCC* it is specified that “Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest” (or other holidays); in other cases, however, for a just cause, one could obtain a dispensation. (Cf. cann. 1247, 1245, 87 and 90).

With the hope that this response may be useful, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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✠ Filippo Iannone  
Prefect

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✠ Juan Ignacio Arrieta  
Secretary



(Copy for the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments)

H.E. The Most Rev. THOMAS JOHN PAPROCKI  
Bishop of Springfield, Illinois  
Chairman, Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops