



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

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25 November 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

On 19th March 2020, the feast of St Joseph, at the start of the recent COVID pandemic when the Queensland government mandated that all public gatherings cease and only essential activities continue, I asked the priests of the Diocese to close our churches. In addition, as Bishop, I suspended the obligation of the faithful of the Diocese of Rockhampton to attend Sunday Mass. As a result, many of the faithful remained connected to their parishes and the Diocese through the live streaming of Mass from the Cathedral and Bishop's House and in some places their own parish.

Time has passed and thankfully the pandemic has moved to the category of endemic. I believe this is the appropriate time to invite you, as the faithful of the Diocese of Rockhampton, to come back to Mass and join our brothers and sisters in our churches on a Sunday and whenever the community gathers for the Sunday Mass. Many of you have done so already. Some of us may have fallen into the habit of watching Mass on the live stream, and given the passing of the pandemic, I ask that you reconsider your decision and join with your parish community for Sunday Mass.

From the earliest times in her history, the Church encouraged all the faithful to gather on the first day of the week, Sunday, the Lord's Day. This weekly gathering connects us with the Risen Jesus who rose from the dead, the first Easter Sunday and the followers gathered on this day to remember him and his resurrection. The Acts of the Apostles documents the faithful gathered on the Sunday for the breaking of the bread<sup>1</sup>. The disciples on the road to Emmaus recognised Jesus at the breaking of the bread<sup>2</sup>. In faithfulness to the tradition, Catholics continue to meet on the Sunday or whenever the community gathers for Sunday Mass<sup>3</sup>.

The pandemic has changed our way of life in so many respects. Just like the apostles at Easter, it forced isolation on many of us because of age and sickness and health issues. On the night of Easter, when Jesus re-entered the disciples' lives, he physically broke through the walls of isolation and fear and stood in their midst. The apostle Thomas stands out in that event in the way he encountered the healing of Jesus who was among them, enjoying the support of his brothers and sisters<sup>4</sup>. When we gather on a Sunday, we too gather with the Risen Jesus who is among us and supporting us through our brothers and sisters. When some of our brothers and sisters are not present, then our gathering is somewhat diminished. We need each other on our journey.

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 2:42

<sup>2</sup> See Luke 24:13-35

<sup>3</sup> Whenever the community gathers for Sunday Mass – in the Churches of the Parishes of the Central West of the Diocese, Sunday Mass may be celebrated on a weekday and thus fulfilling the Sunday obligation.

<sup>4</sup> See John 20:24 ff

**Bishop Michael McCarthy**

The Sunday Mass brings us together to listen to God's word and the church invites us to listen to God speaking to us and not just our own voice. We pray together for one another, remember the Last Supper, and receive Jesus Christ in Holy Communion. Our Sunday Mass is carefully prepared through the various ministries of the parish, readings, the prayers of intercession, the music, the welcomers, and the homily by the priest, coming together and using the same texts and prayers as all the Catholics from across the world.

I invite all the parishioners of the Diocese of Rockhampton to immerse themselves in the richness of the Eucharist, and to resume the practice of weekly Sunday Mass. **I now restore the obligation to attend Sunday Mass from Christmas Day 2022 on all the baptised.**

This obligation includes all people from all parts of the Diocese, with due respect for those communities that may celebrate their Sunday Mass during the week. Those who cannot attend Sunday Mass because of sickness, infirmity, or another equally serious reason are not bound by the Sunday obligation, as has always been the case. I would ask that all parishes be especially attentive to all those who, because of infirmity cannot attend Sunday Mass, and connect them with the Sunday Eucharist by ensuring they receive Holy Communion on Sunday after Mass, so they are joined with their brothers and sisters to the Sunday celebration.

During the pandemic, many parishioners joined by the live streaming from the Cathedral. Those who are infirm and those who live in remote parts of the Diocese can join the Cathedral Community for Sunday Mass live streamed from our Cathedral. Every parish of the Diocese offers the opportunities for attendance at weekday and Sunday Mass, and I invite you to connect with your parish community.

With best wishes for Christmas.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael McCarthy".

Most Rev Michael McCarthy  
Bishop of Rockhampton