

We must always keep in mind that the beauty of the liturgy is *'no mere aestheticism but the concrete way in which the truth of God's love in Christ encounters us, attracts us and delights us'*. We are fortunate across the Diocese to have so many parishioners taking an active part in the liturgical life of the Church – choirs, Ministers of Word and Eucharist, sacristans etc. Celebrating several Masses on a weekend, embracing Saturday evening and Sunday morning, makes it almost impossible to attain this ideal. The Eucharistic celebration seeks to reveal the true face of Christ in every generation, including ours. That is why it should be celebrated with dignity and why the words spoken by the celebrant in the homily or at other times must always reflect this intent.

The work of revising and upgrading the English translation of the Missal, which contains the text of all Masses celebrated during the course of the year, is now more or less concluded. The monumental task of preparing it for printing is already in train. Its promulgation and implementation (within the next two years, it is hoped) will offer an opportunity to again reflect and ponder on the centrality of the Mass in the life of the faithful.



There can be no Mass unless there are priests to celebrate, unless there are those with faith and generosity who are willing to answer the call of the Lord. Vocations to the priesthood are the fruit of prayer. Christ said simply *'pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into His harvest'*. This call to prayer for vocations is one that extends to all members of the community of faith in all parishes. I give thanks for all those who respond to this invitation of Christ, especially those who take part in Eucharistic adoration in all the parishes and the members of the many branches of St. Joseph's Young Priests Society in the Diocese.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,

✠ Michael Smith
Bishop of Meath

31 July 2009

PASTORAL LETTER

FROM

MOST REV MICHAEL SMITH



ON

**THE CO-ORDINATION OF MASSES
IN THE DIOCESE OF MEATH**

JULY 2009

Dear Father,

Recently Pope Benedict commented that *'a Sunday without Mass, the great communal prayer of the Church, is not truly a Sunday: it lacks the very heart of Sunday and so also the light of the week'*. The Eucharist must be at the centre of parish life and this is particularly true of the Sunday celebration. Since the unity of the Church is born from this recurring encounter with the Lord in the Eucharist, great care must be given to its celebration. It draws us into the very mystery of God. This we affirm when, after the Consecration, we invite all present to *'proclaim the mystery of faith'*.



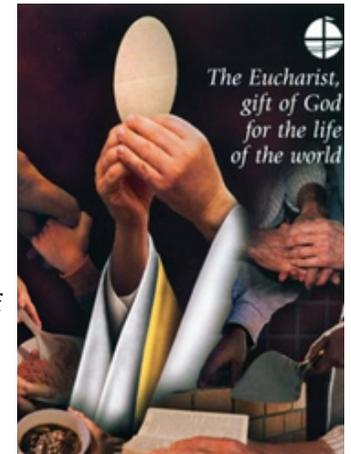
The obligation to attend Sunday Mass is one that rests on each person baptised into the faith. We all share in the priesthood of Christ by virtue of our baptism. Through our baptism we make a commitment to enter into a relationship with God, expressed especially in our celebration of the Eucharist.

The Mass is the central liturgical prayer of the Church, re-enacting Christ's sacrifice on Calvary and fulfilling His promise to continue His

abiding presence with us, *'yes to the end of time'*. It is through the Eucharist that our faith is nurtured and nourished. As people baptised into faith in Christ, we are called to make every effort to fulfil this obligation and not expect that Masses can be arranged for our convenience.

Over the past twenty years the population of the Diocese has more or less doubled and development plans predict a further significant increase over the coming years. While the Diocese has been blessed with a considerable number of Ordinations, these do not replace deaths and retirements. The demands on priests have increased immeasurably over recent years even with the greatly increased involvement of lay faithful in the pastoral life of the parish. The number of priests will not increase in the immediate future and significant changes in regard to the time and number of Masses in parishes is necessary.

All parishes have been asked over recent times to become involved in a process that examines the number of Masses in the individual parishes and the times at which they are celebrated. The Sunday Mass calls us to worship as a community, to listen together to God's Word and to witness to the Lord's presence among us. Parishes have to accept that it will not be possible to continue providing a Sunday Mass for a small number of people just because it is convenient for some and the Mass has always been at that particular time.



The times and places of celebration must respond both to the needs of parish communities and to the constraints posed by the number of priests available. In his letter on the Eucharist, the late Pope John Paul stated quite clearly that *'as regards the time and number of Masses to be celebrated in parishes, the good of the parish community should be kept in mind and the number of Masses should not be so multiplied as to weaken the pastoral effort'*. This process within deaneries and within groups of neighbouring parishes must lead to a reduction in the number of Masses celebrated.

Discussions have already taken place in the deaneries and I am asking that this process be continued and quickly brought to a conclusion. Discussion, involving parishioners and especially those who have direct involvement in the prayer life of the parish, e.g. members of Parish Pastoral Council, Liturgy Committee etc., should take place over the coming months in all the parishes.

The Vicars Forane in each of the eight deaneries in the Diocese have been instructed to oversee this process. It is important that all parishes in the deanery – and where necessary neighbouring parishes – engage with serious intent in this process. It is intended that it be completed before Advent 2009.

