

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish
712 Market Street
Marathon WI 54448

July 2021

Dear Parents of children who are registered in grades 3-8,

I am writing this letter prior to the 2021-2022 school year. I want you to receive it now so that you have the opportunity to read it *carefully* as you prepare for the academic school year.

At the beginning of each school year parents are asked to sign various forms, including a ***Spirituality Code*** indicating that you will make sure that your child attends Sunday Mass on a weekly basis. (For the non-Catholic parents who have your child(ren) enrolled here, you will be asked to sign the code indicating that you will bring your child to your own church of worship or certainly you are welcome to worship at St. Mary's as well).

I am pleased that many parents who have signed the document in past years have been faithful in making sure that their child attends Sunday Mass even when sports or vacation or other conflicts have made Sunday Mass attendance difficult. However, I am aware that for some parents the follow-through has been minimal, and with the past year's dispensation from Sunday Mass due to COVID-19, it may be more difficult to resume the practice of participating in the Sunday Mass. I will always try to be understanding of special circumstances—for example, when parents are separated which can mean that your child spends his/her weekends in various locations. However, I hope that the ***Spirituality Code*** will be given its proper consideration and importance.

The Sunday Mass obligation is very important since it is one of the Ten Commandments. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment of all he said, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*" (Mk 12:29). We cannot love the Lord our God with all our heart if we do not make God the first priority of our lives. Love of God and worship of God needs to take precedence over sports and other things that can pull us away from Sunday Mass if we are going to be faithful to the Commandment. God has only given us Ten Commandments – and they are important for our eternal salvation. You are receiving this letter because once a child has received his or her First Holy Communion which assumes that they have attained the age of reason, it is important that they (and we) try to remain faithful to the Ten Commandments and to the Sunday Mass obligation. Perhaps, however, we should refer to the "obligation" more as a "privilege" for at every Mass the sacrifice of Calvary is commemorated and the Real Presence of Jesus is offered to us in His Body and Blood. What greater gift could there possibly be than for us to have the opportunity to receive God's life given to us in Jesus who is present in the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion. Students in the third grade will be receiving their First Holy Communion on November 14th and they, too, should be participating each week at the Sunday Mass since this is expected of all Catholics.

Throughout my lifetime it has been my inclination to trust others. Therefore, when you sign the *Spirituality Code* my inclination is to trust that you will be faithful to it. I will say,

however, that if someone signs the *Spirituality Code* but does not intend to observe it, this would be a form of deception. We, as adults, would not encourage deception in children. We should hold ourselves to the same standard.

Saint John Paul II wrote an apostolic letter in 2001 entitled *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (On the Beginning of the New Millennium). He stated that parishes in the new millennium were to become schools of prayer and places where “training in holiness” is given. He said that the training in holiness is all about meeting Christ and we can meet Christ not only in imploring His help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration – until our hearts fall in love with Christ. For Catholics, the Sunday Mass is the source and the summit of this encounter.

We are all well aware that the supportive culture of Christendom that once existed in our country has waned significantly. So, too, has the notion of sin. For example, while deliberately missing Sunday Mass is considered a serious sin which required the sacrament of confession for the sin to be forgiven, we know that many Catholics miss Sunday Mass deliberately and think little of it or its consequences. Although the sin has not changed the attitude of many towards sin surely has.

Parents, you have chosen Saint Mary’s School primarily because it provides something that you want for your child(ren). In choosing Saint Mary’s you are also choosing a place where, to again quote Saint John Paul II, “training in holiness” is given. You realize that in the midst of a very secular culture there is still the need for a spiritual life that hungers for God and seeks God’s blessing. I commend you for that and for believing that Saint Mary’s School can partner with you in providing some of the spiritual foundations that you desire for your child(ren).

Any type of union with God begins with God’s grace. The good news is that God wants us to receive His grace so that we can enter into a deeper union with Him. However, for that to happen we have to do our part by disposing ourselves for union with God. One of the best ways to dispose ourselves for a deeper union with God is to be faithful to what God asks of us. The Sunday Mass “privilege” is at the heart of what God asked of us.

And so, parents, as you prepare for the new school year I am asking you to prayerfully consider two things: First, do you really want Saint Mary’s School for your child? I hope that you do. Secondly, if you do want Saint Mary’s School, will you honestly be able to sign the *Spirituality Code* and to observe it with consistency? As I have said, if you sign it, I will want to trust that you will follow through with your commitment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and to understand why I consider the Sunday Mass of such importance. God bless you in these final weeks of summer.

Sincerely,

Father Joseph Diermeier