



Worship Office

Archdiocese of Newark

Liturgy Note

Time of Anticipated and Vigil Masses

February 7, 2023

The faithful are obliged to participate in Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation.¹ This obligation is fulfilled by participating in “a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the **evening** (*vespere*) of the preceding day.”²

In his Apostolic Constitution, *Christus Dominus*, Pope Pius XII directed that evening Masses “shall not begin before four o’clock in the afternoon.”³ In its instruction accompanying *Christus Dominus*, the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (now the Dicastry for the Doctrine of the Faith) reiterated that these Masses “may not be said before four o’clock in the afternoon.”⁴

The Archdiocese of Newark “Policy on Sunday Mass Scheduling,” published in 1985 and revised in 2013, states that:

- There is to be only one anticipated (vigil) Mass for Sunday in each Church.⁵ It may not be scheduled before 4 PM.”
- Vigil Masses for Holy Days of Obligation may not be scheduled before 4 PM.
- No Christmas Eve Mass may be scheduled before 4 PM.

The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is only fulfilled with Masses starting at 4 PM or later on the preceding evening or at any time on the Sunday or Holy Day.

¹ *Code of Canon Law*, 1247.

² *Ibid*, 1248.

³ Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution, *Christus Dominus*, January 6, 1953: Acta Apostolicae Sedis [AAS] 45 (1953), 15-24.

⁴ Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, *Instruction on the Discipline concerning the Eucharistic Fast*, January 6, 1953: AAS 45 (1953), 47-51.

⁵ There may be more than one anticipated Mass to satisfy the language needs of the parish.

Christmas and Easter

On October 20, 2020, the Archdiocese of Newark issued an update “Celebrating Christmas During Covid-19” which stated that “For this year only, an early Christmas Eve Mass may be celebrated beginning at 2 PM, if you are adding Masses for social distancing and time to clean and sanitize between Masses in order to protect and accommodate all parishioners and visitors.” Because of government capacity limitations, this extraordinary measure was taken to allow as many of the faithful as possible to attend Mass for Christmas.⁶ That permission was for 2020 only and was not given again.

Therefore, no anticipated or vigil Mass, including on Christmas Eve, may begin earlier than 4 PM.

Of special note is the Easter Vigil, which “must take place during the **night** (*noctu*), so that it begins after nightfall and ends before daybreak on the Sunday.”⁷ Therefore, in the Archdiocese of Newark, the Easter Vigil Mass may not be scheduled before 8:15 PM. **No Masses for Easter may be celebrated before the Easter Vigil.**



⁶ In 2020, in the Archdiocese of Newark, the obligation to attend Mass had been abrogated.

⁷ *Roman Missal*, The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night, 3.