



## The Observance of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

“On New Year’s Day, the octave day of Christmas, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God. The divine and virginal motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a singular salvific event: for Our Lady it was the foretaste and cause of her extraordinary glory; for us it is a source of grace and salvation because ‘through her we have received the Author of life.’”<sup>1</sup> As Pope Francis has said in a homily for this celebration, “The year opens in the name of the Mother of God... At the beginning of the year, we... as Christians on our pilgrim way, feel the need to set out anew... to leave behind the burdens of the past and to start over from the things that really matter.” This feast, he continues, “tells us that if we want to go forward, we need to turn back: to begin anew from the crib, from the Mother who holds God in her arms.”<sup>2</sup>

Could there be a better way to celebrate the end of one year, and the beginning of a new one, than to give thanks to God as a gathered Church in the celebration of the Eucharist?

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God is observed as a holy day of obligation in the universal Roman calendar as well as that of the United States. In past years, although it has remained a holy day, a dispensation from the obligation to participate in Mass has routinely been granted in many dioceses in California, including that of Stockton.<sup>3</sup> In this, we followed the general practice of our ecclesiastical province, that of San Francisco.

Since that practice began, however, several dioceses in our province, including the metropolitan see, have returned to following the wider national practice of regularly observing January 1<sup>st</sup> as a holy day of obligation.

In light of the above, please note:

- **In accordance with the United States complementary norms to Canon 1242 §2, January 1<sup>st</sup>, the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, will be observed as a holy day of obligation in the Diocese of Stockton.**
- **The Diocese of Stockton will continue to follow the same norms of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops regarding when the obligation is abrogated; namely, when January 1<sup>st</sup> falls on a Saturday or Monday.**

<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 115.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily for the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God*, January 1, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> A bishop may dispense his subjects from the obligation to attend Mass, but a holy day can only be suppressed by the national conference of bishops with the prior approval of the Apostolic See (see CIC, 1246 §2)

The time prior to any holy day of obligation presents a good opportunity for catechesis on the nature and purpose of holy days of obligation. The faithful should also be reminded that serious circumstances can excuse them from the obligation of rest and participation at Mass, such as illness, care of infants, needing to work to support themselves or their family, etc., or that for just reasons, in individual cases, they may be dispensed from the obligation by their own pastor.<sup>4</sup>

It should also be noted that, following the initiative of Pope St. Paul VI, January 1<sup>st</sup> is also observed in the Church as the World Day of Peace. In the light of our celebration of the first coming of the Prince of Peace, and our hope in his glorious return, it is particularly appropriate to pray on this day for a greater outpouring of that “peace of God which surpasses all understanding.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. CCC 2181, CIC 1245.

<sup>5</sup> Phil 4:7