



ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS CLERGY BULLETIN

November, 2009

Volume I, Number 5, Revised

Early Masses on Christmas Eve

Reverend and dear Fathers,

I am aware that for several years now, a number of parishes around the Archdiocese have been offering Christmas Vigil Masses earlier than 4:00 p.m. during the day of December 24 in order to accommodate the high numbers that join the Church for prayer at this sacred time. The desire to accommodate visitors on such an important occasion is laudable, and we all should be grateful that such solutions even need to be considered in order to welcome so many, some of whom have not attended Mass for quite some time. However, I am concerned that the practice of offering Masses so early on December 24 has, in fact, contributed to a gradual loss of awareness among the Faithful about the sacred importance of Christmas Day itself, and has led to a misunderstanding about the nature of a Vigil Mass. Therefore, prompted by both my own concerns and the encouragement of pastors who have asked for clarification on this matter, **it is the policy of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis that Christmas Vigil Masses may not be celebrated earlier than 4:00 p.m. on December 24.**

I believe that the English texts supplied by the Church for the celebration of the Christmas Vigil are helpful when determining the most fitting time to celebrate this particular Mass. In both the alternative opening prayer and in the prayer over the gifts supplied by the Church for this Vigil, reference is made to waiting for the dawn, a beautiful allusion to those pericopes of scripture in which the waiting for the coming of morning which will end a long night is akin to the patient waiting for the Lord's salvation. What is more, in the first preface of Christmas, the celebrant is significantly told to include the phrase "we celebrate that night" when using Eucharistic Prayer I and

celebrating the Christmas Vigil. It thus seems most fitting to offer these prayers following sunset.

The 1975 Clergy Bulletin of my predecessor, the Most Reverend John R. Roach, relative to Christmas Masses, is still to be followed. This document (Volume I, Number 5) may be found on page 237 of the Archdiocesan Clergy Bulletin. It is left to pastors to decide which celebration, whether the Vigil of Christmas or the Mass at Night, will be offered after 4:30 p.m. While I believe it would be most appropriate to celebrate the Vigil for Christmas up until midnight or shortly before this time, the Church does allow for pastoral accommodations in this area.

I thank you for your cooperation in this matter. It is my belief that celebrating the Vigil of Christmas no earlier than 4:00 p.m. will better allow us all to respect the intention as well as the ancient tradition of the Church of keeping holy the feast day itself.

Given at Saint Paul, Minnesota, this 12th day of November, in the year of Our Lord 2009. All things to the contrary notwithstanding.



The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis



Jennifer Haselberger
Chancellor for Canonical Affairs