



Praenotanda

From the Office of Divine Worship Vigil Masses for Sundays and Holy Days

MEMORANDUM

TO: Priests of the Diocese of Rockford

FROM: The Most Reverend Thomas G. Doran, D.D., J.C.D.
Bishop of Rockford

DATE: November 3, 2006

RE: Vigil Masses for Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

Every year my office and the Office of Divine Worship receive questions regarding the appropriate time to begin Vigil Masses for Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.

Canon 1248§1 allows for an evening Mass or Masses. The cited canon in describing evening Mass uses the words *vel vespere diei praecedentis* and has always been interpreted to mean at or after 4:00 in the afternoon (c.f. *Christus Dominus VI*, January 6, 1953 (AA S45 (1953) 14-24); J. Heuls and T. Willis, "What Time for Anticipated Masses?" *Emmanuel* 96 (1990): 34-41.

Therefore, I would advise you to plan ahead and ensure that you communicate to your parish that no Vigil Masses, especially Christmas Vigils, can begin prior to 4:00 p.m. in order to fulfill their obligation.

I offer the following to assist you in your planning for Christmas:

1. The Fourth Sunday of Advent is observed on Saturday, December 23 and Sunday, December 24. Masses for the Fourth Sunday of Advent should conclude at a time that will allow for the preparation of the Church for the celebration of Christmas.
2. There can be no evening Masses on Sunday, December 24 which are for the Fourth Sunday of Advent since Christmas has its own proper Vigil.
3. Both the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas are days of obligation in which the faithful are required to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist.
4. If necessary, an additional Anticipated Mass for the Fourth Sunday of Advent may be

scheduled following the ordinary Saturday evening Mass for the convenience of the faithful.

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5. Masses for the Vigil of Christmas cannot be scheduled before 4:00 p.m. in accord with Church law.

6. For obvious family reasons, Masses for Christmas Day should be celebrated at times to allow for parish staff (priests, deacons, ministers of music and liturgy) to enjoy the celebration of the Solemnity of Christmas with their families.

7. The Midnight Mass is the first Mass of Christmas and cannot begin before twelve o'clock midnight under any circumstances. It is, of course, permissible to have an evening Mass late on the evening of Christmas Eve, but it is the Vigil of Christmas and not Midnight Mass.