

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
For Immediate Attention: COVID-19 Orders-- U.S. Navy



A few nights ago I watched *Silence*, a movie about the persecution of Catholics in Japan in the 1600's. The persecution was systematic and destined to eradicate the faith from the islands. While the current situation in the US is certainly not one of persecution, the movie does invite the viewer to recognize values, determine how important they are, and decide what value merits a sacrifice, even the ultimate sacrifice.

Several of the faithful whom the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, is privileged to serve have brought to my attention the recent prohibition by the US Navy in some commands of participation in indoor religious services off base. Service members are required to sign that they have received the FRAG orders. Those who disobey will be held accountable.

The orders also add that "civilian personnel, including families, are discouraged from" indoor church services, as well.

The provision is particularly odious to Catholics, because frequently there is no longer a Catholic program on naval installations due to budgetary constraints or many installation chapels are still closed—even though many of them could well ensure appropriate social distancing.

Of course, the Navy cannot legally prohibit family members from frequenting religious services off base. Those family members return home where the military member lives. What is the protective effect of the prohibition for the Navy personnel? Zero.

Upon receiving this information I immediately contacted the Navy Chief of Chaplains' Office. They have been unable to offer any relief from these provisions. My attempt to contact the Chief of Naval Operations has not even been acknowledged.

Participation in the Sunday Eucharist is life blood for Catholics. It is the source and summit of our lives and allows us to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. Certainly, the Navy personnel who fall under this restriction are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, because no one can be required to do what is impossible.

However, given the great lengths to which Catholic churches (and I presume others) have gone in order to ensure social distancing in seating, receiving Holy Communion, and even adjust the liturgy to avoid any contagion, I wonder why the Navy has decided to prohibit the faithful from something, which even the Commander and Chief has called an essential service.

I want to assure the Navy Catholic faithful of my prayerful solidarity, invite them to continue to participate in Masses that are broadcast or live-streamed, and to be fervent in their faith. This situation will pass and, as Pope Francis reminded us, Christ is in the boat with us.

It seems tragic to offer these reflections on the Independence holiday when we honor the bravery of those who forged this Nation to ensure self-evident truths about the endowment by the Creator of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Should those who swear to protect and defend the Constitution be obliged to surrender their First Amendment Rights?

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