
REDISCOVERING SUNDAY (1)



At the session on pastoral restructuring I asked the heads of parishes to give a series of sermons on the meaning of Sunday, for a few weeks in January and February; the reason for this is to show that the Sunday eucharist advances in a special way the building up of the Christian community. Our resource in this matter will be the fine text published last May 31 by Pope John Paul II, *On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*. [*The Lord's Day*. Apostolic Letter "Anno Domini" of the Holy Father Pope John Paul... Sherbrooke, Qc: Médiapaul, 1998]

THE LORD'S DAY

The Lord's Day has always been accorded special attention in the history of the Church because of its close connection with the very core of the Christian mystery. In fact, in the weekly reckoning of time Sunday recalls the day of Christ's resurrection. It is *Easter* which returns week by week, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, the fulfilment in him of the first creation and the dawn of "the new creation." It is the day which recalls in grateful adoration the world's first day and looks forward in active hope to "the last day", when Christ will come in glory and all things will be made new.

DAY OF REJOICING

Rightly, then, the Psalmist's cry is applied to Sunday: "This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it." This invitation to joy, which the Easter liturgy makes its own, reflects the astonishment which came over the women who, having seen the crucifixion of Christ, found the tomb empty when they went there "very early on the first day after the Sabbath". It is an invitation to relive in some way the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus, who felt their hearts "burn within them" as the Risen One walked with them on the road, explaining the Scriptures and revealing himself in "the breaking of the bread". And it echoes the joy - at first uncertain and then overwhelming - which the Apostles experienced on the evening of that same day, when they were visited by the Risen Jesus and received the gift of his peace and of his Spirit.

MYSTERY OF TIME

The resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental event upon which Christian faith rests. It is an astonishing reality, fully grasped in the light of faith, yet historically attested to by those who were privileged to see the Risen Lord. It is a wondrous event which is not only absolutely unique in human history, but which lies at *the very heart of the mystery of time*. In fact, "all time belongs to [Christ] and all the ages," as the evocative liturgy of the Easter Vigil recalls in preparing the paschal candle. Therefore, in commemorating the day of Christ's Resurrection not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church seeks to indicate to every generation the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world's origin and its final destiny leads.

LORD OF DAYS

It is right, therefore, to claim, in the words of a fourth century homily, that "the Lord's Day" is "the lord of days." Those who have received the grace of faith in the Risen Lord cannot fail to grasp the significance of this day of the week with the same deep emotion which led Saint Jerome to say: "Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, it is the day of Christians, it is our day." For Christians, Sunday is "the fundamental feastday," established not only to mark the succession of time but to reveal time's deeper meaning.

SENSE OF HISTORY

The fundamental importance of Sunday has been recognized through two thousand years of history and was emphatically restated by the Second Vatican Council: "Every seven days, the Church celebrates the Easter mystery. This is a tradition going back to the Apostles, taking its origin from the actual day of Christ's Resurrection - a day appropriately called 'the Lord's Day'." [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106] The coming of the Third Millennium, which calls believers to reflect upon the course of history in the light of Christ, also invites them to rediscover with new intensity the meaning of Sunday: its "mystery," its celebration, its significance for Christian and human life.

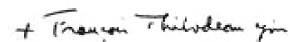
NEW CONTEXT

Until quite recently, it was easier in traditionally Christian countries to keep Sunday holy because it was an almost universal practice and because, even in the organization of civil society, Sunday rest was considered a fixed part of the work schedule. Today, however, even in those countries which give legal sanction to the festive character of Sunday, changes in socio-economic conditions have often led to profound modifications of social behavior and hence of the character of Sunday. The custom of the weekend has become more widespread, a weekly period of respite, spent perhaps far from home and often involving participation in cultural, political or sporting activities which are usually held on free days.

LOSS OF ORIGINAL MEANING

This social and cultural phenomenon is by no means without its positive aspects if, while respecting true values, it can contribute to people's development and to the advancement of the life of society as a whole. All of this responds not only to the need for rest, but also the need for celebration which is inherent in our humanity. Unfortunately, when Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes merely part of a weekend, it can happen that people stay locked within a horizon so limited that they can no longer see "the heavens." Hence, though ready to celebrate, they are really incapable of doing so.

Have a good Sunday!



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