
ARE OUR SUNDAYS STILL EASTER SUNDAYS?



At this time when in several areas discussions are going on whether or not to keep businesses open on Sunday, I would like to stress once again the profound meaning of this particular day; in the last ten years I have commented several times on this basic question.

A “PLUCKED SUNDAY”

If we did not consider it with eyes of faith, our Sundays could simply look like the famed bird of the French folk song “Alouette,” the lark whose fathers are plucked bit by bit, from the head, the wings, the back, etc., “Alouette!” In like manner, our Sundays were “plucked” first by sports events when sports arenas opened early Sunday morning for activities and competitions. In certain areas, especially where our Baptist brothers and sisters are more numerous, tradition dictated that such organised activities not take place Sunday mornings, which were dedicated to prayer. Christian churches held a number of campaigns to keep Sunday as the Lord’s Day. Our Sundays were “plucked” further by organising field trips and excursions of all kinds, on Sundays: to that effect the Sunday Mass was anticipated on Saturday so that travellers could attend religious services. Then Sundays were “plucked” by the Christians themselves who did not see any particular reason for regularly attending church services. Numbers gradually dwindled, and more than 75% of them stopped attending altogether, maintaining no ties with the local church community since the Sunday precept was no longer considered binding upon growing generations. Finally, the Sundays were weakened further still from being the Lord’s Day by the opening of businesses on Sunday, all for the best of reasons: in answer to customer needs, competition and profit to make, as well as the opening of interprovincial and international markets. That is how Sundays were gradually “plucked” of any semblance they once had of being the Lord’s Day.

SHOULD IT DISAPPEAR?

If there were to be even more “plucking” of Sunday, we should not be surprised to see the day disappear altogether. In fact, there are several people who see no need for having this day any different from the others. In some places, Sunday as Lord’s Day has already disappeared. This may come as a shock to the faithful, but we must admit that Sunday is part and parcel of their faith. Jews hold Saturday sacred: the Sabbath. Muslims worship on Friday, day when the people attend prayer at the mosque. Our ancestors in the faith gave themselves rules and institutions, to support their basic beliefs, and among these rules and institutions, there was Sunday. Our ancestors felt and believed that they owed their very lives to a Creator God. Despite their extreme poverty they could yet set aside and “consecrate” one day each week for prayer and thanksgiving to God. Everyone needed and could take a day of rest. Sunday was family day, community day. The people did not feel isolated from one another, as on an island. They felt themselves part of the same human and Christian community. They had worked hard every day of the week, and they needed a period of rest. It isn’t for nothing that some farmers and woods workers attended church but still nodded off to sleep when sermon time came up! Despite the frequent absence of clergy among them, our ancestors felt the need to get together for prayer on Sunday, to teach their children the basics of the faith, and fellowship together. The community gathering was the first element of the Lord’s Day, the second was sharing the Word of God, and the third was the eucharistic celebration when the priest was there. And people would travel miles to be part of the gathering community.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Even if examining one’s conscience is not very popular, it seems to me that there we must try to look honestly at our personal and community lives, and determine whether our vision of life agree with our deepest beliefs. At a time when it is sometimes “cool” to say or hear that religion is a personal thing, we can ask ourselves whether Jesus’ resurrection concerns but very few people or all humankind. The hope which sprang forth from

this unique Event in the history of humanity is not the legacy of a few outmoded adepts but a hope which the world today has an even greater need. Must we hide the light we bear under the bushel basket, or should we set it high up, where it will shine on others? Is there need to awaken in each one of us, more than we dare, the hope of resurrection. What is our deepest reason for participating or not in the Sunday celebration, with our brothers and sisters? Could it be that in a secularised world like ours we are not allowed to express the hope that animates us?

A QUESTION OF LAW?

The Sunday question is more than a question of law. It is a question of expressing in our laws and institutions what it is that gives us life today. And now, will people who are obliged to work on Sunday be free to accept or not, or will they be penalised and deprived of their livelihood for keeping the Lord's day of rest? Aren't there enough store hours to answer customer needs? We would like to leave to future generations a more beautiful and more hope-filled world, a fellowship of people. Do the values now propagated in our society sufficiently express our basic convictions? Our ancestors knew the meaning of Easter, and they were affected by it to such a degree that they decided to gather together every first day of the week to commemorate the Event. The great news given by the angels to the women who came to the tomb early in the morning, is referred to and proclaimed again every Sunday: "He is not here, he has been raised up and we, too, shall be raised up!" Every Christian must proclaim this great news. The feast of Easter must be hailed as the dawn of a new day and a new season. As the word "Easter" – or Passover – indicates, we have "passed" from winter to spring, the passage has already been made. To Christians, Easter is really "the springtime of God, springtime of the heart, springtime of Christ" (Robert Lebel). Jesus has passed from death to life and with him, we, too, shall pass from death to life. This was the event which our ancestors insisted on celebrating week after week. We have inherited their faith and are heirs of their steadfast hope. We can celebrate Easter every Sunday!

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