



From A Bishop's Journal (733)

Keeping Holy the Lord's Day

On November 10, 1995, following the 1987-1990 Diocesan Synod I published a pastoral instruction on revaluing the Lord's Day. Social and religious situations have greatly changed, since then: problems with the application of this instruction have been mentioned to me, and on several occasions I have had to grant dispensations so as to respond to the spiritual and pastoral needs of some communities. On May 31, 1998 Pope John Paul II published an apostolic letter on keeping Sunday holy. Following this instruction, I want to reflect once again with you not only on the Sunday gathering but also on keeping our Sundays holy – thus modifying my November, 1995 pastoral instruction.

What is Becoming of Our Sundays?

On several occasions, in my different writings I have referred to the marvel that is the Lord's Day, and this, especially in my second book (on hope), because our way of living the Lord's Day is a sign of hope to all around us. It is in total simplicity and confidence that I address myself to everyone, that in our soul and conscience we may judge whether our way of keeping today the Lord's Day contributes to making our Sundays holy. Whether or not we take part in the different Lord's Day services, are our Sundays different from the other days of the week, for us, at the heart of our lives? I am well aware that our traditions and legislation have pretty well reshaped the meaning of Sunday: the hours of work, opened businesses, sports and cultural activities have modified our ways of doing things. Honestly, though, where have our Sundays gone? Are they days of rest, a break from the work week, a family day, a day of prayer, a day for doing volunteer work... or are they just days like any other day? The first part of this reflection together is to honestly look at how we live our Sundays. How and in what are Sundays made holy? In what way are they set aside to praise God personally and as a community? How are they "signs of hope" for a better future?

The Feeling of Belonging

The Diocesan Synod recommendations and my 1995 instruction aimed at restoring the specialness of our Sunday gatherings, that our celebrations be noted more for their quality than quantity which generally fragments our communities; that a liturgy team prepare Sunday celebrations with care, with appropriate gathering songs, with a simple but spiritually uplifting homily, and that every baptised

person truly feel at home and fully take part in every celebration. To reach these objectives, except for a few of the bigger-sized parishes, it seemed that a single community celebration would be necessary. Despite the fact that the number of celebrations has decreased over the last years, we still have forty-four Sunday celebrations, 22 on Saturday evenings and 22 on Sunday mornings, for some 15,000 who attend. If there are fewer than 25% of the baptised participating in these gatherings, what will happen to our Christian communities and even our churches, in a few years? This is the second element of our reflection: It is therefore addressed to the entire community of the baptised, so that we can have at our Sunday masses liturgies that are alive, well-prepared by our liturgy teams. Let us not abandon our Sunday gatherings. They are so special, as they allow us to meet our brothers and sisters and together listen to the Word of God and receive the Eucharist. Sunday celebrations in church must have priority over those we could have in seniors' homes and convalescent homes: In these places, the celebrations can be held during the week. The 2006 Pastoral Orientation Congress is clear on this.

Saturday Evening Celebration

In order to make easier for travellers and those involved in activities such as working Sundays, the Holy See has allowed for over forty years now celebrations on Saturday evenings and this, as a special concession. However, each bishop may determine the time when the Saturday celebration can begin. However, what was meant to be an exceptional norm has become a general rule. Following a number of consultations, I decided that as of the fourth Sunday in Advent 2007, that is, December 23, only those masses celebrated after 4:00 P.M. Saturday are regarded as Sunday liturgies. Pastoral teams and liturgy committees shall determine the time of these celebrations, after consultation with neighbour parishes. May the broadening of these hours of celebration not be an excuse for us to multiply the number of celebrations or to ask the priests to celebrate several masses. This accommodation is for a better preparation of our celebrations: The presidents of these assemblies, who are also moderators of three or four parishes, should not be forced to run from one church to another for celebrations, with no time left to meet the faithful of the community and to talk to them. If Church legislation (canons 905 and following) stipulates that a priest is not allowed to celebrate more than once a day apart from those cases of necessity or shortage of priests, and that the priest be duly prepared spiritually to celebrate the eucharistic sacrifice and make a thanksgiving after the celebration, I want to specify that no priest can be forced to celebrate more than three (3) masses on weekends, especially on the same day.

Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours in the Absence of a Priest

I want to remind you that in the absence of a priest a Sunday celebration can be held in the parish church: It is the Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours ("Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest"). I ask all members of pastoral teams to train people to lead these celebrations. These celebrations may not be held two consecutive Sundays in the same church, and the faithful must be made ready for them. Stress shall be given to the richness of the Word of God shared and celebrated together.

Weddings and Funerals

In order to give pride of place to the Sunday gathering, weddings and funerals are to be avoided on the Lord's Day, unless they are very well pastorally incorporated within the Sunday gathering.

May the weekly Lord's Day continue to be kept holy throughout our diocese!

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