

The Lord's Day and Easter

The Lord's Day — as Sunday was called from Apostolic times — 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 fulfillment in him of the first creation and the dawn of "the new creation" (DD 1)

Dies Domini

Apostolic Letter of John Paul II
on the Lord's Day

The Lord's Day and Easter

- The Easter liturgy reflects the astonishment of the women who found the tomb empty when they went there "very early on the first day after the Sabbath."
- The Easter liturgy is an invitation to relive the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus, who felt their hearts "burn within them" as the Risen One explained the Scriptures and revealed himself in "the breaking of the bread."
- The Easter liturgy echoes the joy 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 Spirit (DD 1).

All Time belongs to Christ

- The Resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental event upon which Christian faith rests.
- The Resurrection 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.
- 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.
- For Christians, Sunday is the fundamental feast day (DD 2).

Importance of Sunday

- The fundamental importance of Sunday has been recognized for 2000 years.
- "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 thus appropriately designated 'the Lord's Day'" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106) (DD 3).

Cultural Sense of Sunday

- In many places, Sunday rest was considered a fixed part of the work schedule.
- Changing conditions have led to the custom of a "weekend" respite, spent in cultural, political, or sporting activities. This can be positive.
- However, 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. Sunday is a time of keeping the Lord's Day holy, and not merely a time of rest and relaxation (DD 4).

Current State of Affairs

- The sense of devotion to Sunday varies from country to country.
- The severe shortage of priests in some regions does not guarantee that Sunday Mass is always available.
- The Holy Father seeks to recover the doctrinal foundations of the Sunday precept, so that the abiding value of Sunday in the Christian life will be clear to all the faithful (DD 5-6).

Exhortation to the Reader

John Paul II states: "From the beginning of my Pontificate, I have not ceased to repeat: 'Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ!' In the same way, today I would strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday: Do not be afraid to give your time to Christ! Yes, let us open our time to Christ, that he may cast light upon it and give it direction. ... The rediscovery of this day is a grace which we must implore, ... so that we may respond concretely to the deepest human yearnings. Time given to Christ is never time lost, but is rather time gained, so that our relationships and indeed our whole life may become more profoundly human" (DD 7).

Chapters in Dies Domini

1. DIES DOMINI (*The Day of the Lord*)
The Celebration of the Creator's Work
2. DIES CHRISTI (*The Day of Christ*)
The Day of the Risen Lord and of the Gift of the Holy Spirit
3. DIES ECCLESIAE (*The Day of the Church*)
The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday
4. DIES HOMINIS (*The Day of Man*)
Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity
5. DIES DIERUM (*The Day of Days*)
Sunday: the Primordial Feast, Revealing the Meaning of Time

I: Dies Domini Celebration of the Creator's Work

What do we learn from the story of Creation and the Sabbath day of rest?

I: Dies Domini Celebration of the Creator's Work

- We recall the original creation by God the Father, but also by God the Son "through whom all things were made" (Jn 1:3).
- The first creation culminated in the Sabbath Rest.
- Sunday is a celebration of the New Creation of Christ, the redemption of all creation.
- Therefore, to understand Sunday, we must re-read the story of creation and examine our understanding of the Sabbath (DD 8).

I: Dies Domini Celebration of the Creator's Work

- God is "at work" fashioning creation, making it to be good. The world remains good until disfigured by sin, creating the need for redemption.
- Man is also at work, charged with the duty to master the earth and subdue it.
- As God rested from the work of creation, man is also to rest from his work (DD 9-11).

I: Dies Domini

Celebration of the Creator's Work

- God is always at work (Jn 5:17), so God's rest is not an inactivity.
- Rather, God's rest is gaze on the very good work of creation with a joyous delight. It is a contemplative gaze to admire beauty.
- The gaze of the Lord upon his beloved creation is a foreshadowing of the covenant of love that would be made with Israel and fulfilled in Christ.
- The day of rest is a time for man to gaze on our beloved God as a bride loves the bridegroom (DD 12).

I: Dies Domini

Celebration of the Creator's Work

- By leaving aside work and making time to praise God, we acknowledge our dependence on Him: A detachment from the world.
- "Remember" the Sabbath to keep it holy. We keep it holy by "remembering" what God has done. Jesus would later tell us at the Last Supper to "do this in remembrance of me." (DD 15-17)
- Remembrance is not passive, but implies an active recalling of God's actions. (Recall "full and active participation" of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.)

II: Dies Christi

Day of the Risen Lord

How does the Resurrection affect our celebration of Mass on Sunday?

I: Dies Domini

Celebration of the Creator's Work

- The Sabbath rest – the time to love the God who have loved us – defines our relationship with God.
- Sabbath rest is not simply a commandment with its origin at Mt. Sinai. It is an invitation to love whose origin goes back to the Garden of Eden.
- Faith helps us rediscover the holiness of this day as an expression of the covenant, a kind of spousal love between God and man (DD 13-14).

I: Dies Domini

Celebration of the Creator's Work

Questions for personal reflection:

- *In what ways is Sunday rest different from a day of work?*
- *In what ways is Sunday a time to gaze upon God in love?*
- *In what ways is Sunday a time to be detached from the world?*
- *How do I remember what God has done on Sunday?*

II: Dies Christi

Day of the Risen Lord

- The seventh day of the Sabbath gives way to the eighth day of the Lord's Resurrection.
- The celebration of the "first day of the week" is a tradition established in the scriptures from the earliest apostolic times (DD 19-22).

II: Dies Christi Day of the Risen Lord

- The original creation began on the first day of the week. In Christ, the first day of the week becomes the Easter celebration of the new creation.
- Sunday can also be called the eighth day: a symbol of the day to come, the eternal age of life without end in Heaven (DD 24-26).

II: Dies Christi Day of the Risen Lord

- The identity of the Lord's Day must be protected in the Church. For 2000 years, the Lord's Day has structured the history of the Church.
- In pagan times, the early Church heroically struggled to keep the Lord Day when the local culture did not. In these cases, Christians had to make great sacrifices to rise before dawn to sanctify the day.
- In modern times, pressures can make it harder to fulfill our Sunday obligation. The church works to preserve the rich outpouring of grace found in celebrating the Lord's Day. It is an indispensable element of our Christian identity (DD 30).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

What traditions have developed in the Church regarding the Lord's Day?

As a Catholic, how do I observe the Lord's Day?

II: Dies Christi Day of the Risen Lord

- In pagan cultures, Sunday was the day to worship the Sun God. In Christianity, Sunday is the day of light in which we worship the "Son of God" who is the true light of the world (DD 27).
- Sunday is also the day when the fire of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples on Easter (Jn 20:22-23) and on Pentecost (Acts 2:2-3). We are enlivened on Sunday by the Holy Spirit (DD 28).
- Sunday is a day of faith, when Thomas doubted no longer and believed. This is stressed by our public profession of the faith (DD 29).

II: Dies Christi Day of the Risen Lord

Questions for personal reflection:

- *How is the Resurrection reflected in our Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day?*
- *How is the joy of the early Church at the Resurrection present in our Sunday celebration?*
- *Do I see Sunday as an indispensable commemoration of our salvation?*

III: DIES ECCLESIAE The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- We are not saved as individuals but as a people gathered together as the Body of Christ.
- The Church gathers to testify to the unity of that Body, reflecting the early community of disciples who gathered to celebrate the breaking of the bread.
- In the Eucharist, we who are many are one body because we partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:17). We are not only nourished by the Eucharist. We witness to this unity every time the Eucharist is celebrated (DD 31-32).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- The most important parish activity is the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist fosters a sense of unity in which the people are gathered around their bishop, (especially in the cathedral) or in the parish assembly in which the pastor represents the bishop.
- The connection of the people with their bishop is present when the pope and bishop are mentioned by name in the Eucharistic Prayer (DD 34-35).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- In the Eucharist, we look forward to marriage supper of the Lamb of God in Heaven.
- While here on Earth, we draw strength from the Mass to be a witness to the world, practicing charity in the world of work.
- Our Christian hope teaches us to work in this world with our eyes focused on the world to come (DD 38).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- The Eucharist is our great "thanksgiving" in which we make a return to the Father.
- The Eucharist has an ascending movement in which the Lord, who descended to take on our human condition, now lifts us up as he ascends to the Father. In the Eucharist, we "lift up our hearts" to the Lord.
- The sacrifice of Christ is truly present in the Mass. Christ's one sacrifice is represented to us under the species of bread and wine. We share in this sacrifice by offering our burdens and accomplishments (DD 42-43).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity with God: We encounter the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- Sunday is a day also for unity within the family, gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist. Parents must teach their children to participate in Sunday Mass.
- On Sunday, we gather as a pilgrim people, awaiting our Savior's return, like the bride waiting for the coming of the bridegroom (DD 36-37).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- At Mass, we are fed by the word and by the Body of Christ.
- The homily, especially on Sunday, opens the treasures of the Bible more abundantly for the people. The homily should not be omitted on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
- The people should prepare to hear the word so it will bear greater fruit within them.
- The solemn proclamation of the word is a dialogue between God and his people. We hear God speak and we respond with thanks and praise (DD 39-41).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- The Mass is communal because we share in the life of Christ in the banquet of Holy Communion.
- Mass is also communal because we gather with our brothers and sisters, attentive to their needs. The sign of peace expresses this charity.
- At the end of Mass, we are dismissed back into our everyday surroundings, but with the command to bear witness to the world with the strength of the grace we have received (DD 44-45).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- In early days, some Christians faced martyrdom for assisting in the Lord's Supper on Sunday.
- As time went on, the requirement to assist at Mass became defined in Church law. Missing Mass on Sunday is a grave sin, in light of the fundamental importance of the Sunday celebration.
- It is a special duty to keep holy the Lord's Day, by hearing the word of God, by offering the sacrifice of the Lord, by keeping the day holy by means of prayer, works of charity and abstinence from work (DD 46-48).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- Sunday Mass should have a festive character, which can appropriately be expressed in song. Singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuate the solemnity of the celebration, and foster the sense of a common faith and a shared love.
- Music should be worthy of the liturgy.
- All are called to take an active part in the liturgy (DD 50-51).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- The sick and disabled who cannot attend Mass are encouraged to unite themselves from afar, meditating on the prayers and readings in the Missal.
- Though Mass on radio or television does not satisfy the Sunday obligation, it is a precious help for those who are excused by an incapacity. Generous extraordinary ministers bring them not only the Eucharist but also the greetings and solidarity of the entire community (DD 53-54).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- In order to provide the faithful the opportunity to satisfy their obligation, pastors are bound to offer sufficient Masses for the people.
- The vigil Mass offered after Vespers of the day preceding is the "festive" Mass of Sunday and satisfies the obligation.
- Pastors must encourage the faithful to attend Sunday Mass, even if traveling. Parishes should similarly welcome visitors who join them for Sunday Mass (DD 49).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

- Beyond Sunday Mass, how else can we make Holy the Lord's Day? By a grateful and active remembrance of God's saving work.
- Family life, social relationships, and moments of relaxation are ways in which the joy of the Risen Lord can emerge in the events of our life.
- Families are encouraged to gather together to listen to each other, and to pray together. Sunday vespers is a wonderful tradition to complete the day.
- Even a pilgrimage to a shrine, especially with the whole family, is a wonderful way to more intensely experience the faith (DD 52).

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

Questions for personal reflection:

- *How can a parish better teach the importance of gathering as a community on the Lord's Day?*
- *How can a parish make Sunday Mass the most important activity of the week?*
- *We have a duty to hear the Word of God. How can we better prepare to hear that word?*
- *We have a duty to participate in the Lord's sacrifice. How can we be better aware that we are called to unite our personal sacrifices actively with those on the altar?*
- *How can I make Sunday more a day of prayer?*

III: DIES ECCLESIAE

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

Questions for personal reflection:

- *How can I practice works of charity on Sunday?*
- *How can I draw fruit from Sunday in order to bear witness to the world?*
- *How does time for family, social activities, and relaxation contribute to our understanding of Sunday as the Lord's Day?*
- *What does it mean to rest from unnecessary work and be detached from the world?*
- *Saturday evening Mass satisfies the obligation, how does one observe Sunday?*

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

- Sunday is not just an obligation, but a day of joy – a day celebrating the resurrection.
- The disciples rejoiced to see the Lord who told them they would weep, but their sorrow would become rejoicing. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- This joy is not the shallow feeling of satisfaction or pleasure which last but a moment. Real joy is enduring and consoling, holding firm even in suffering. This joy is a virtue to be nourished.
- We should celebrate Sunday Eucharist with the joy of Christ whom we encounter as the one who loves us and saves us (DD 55-58).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

- Therefore, even on the Lord's Day, we observe the Sabbath rest found in the third Commandment.
- Yet, Christ resisted an overly legalistic interpretation of the day of rest, performing miracles even on the Sabbath.
- The Sabbath commemorated the exodus from slavery. On the Lord's Day, we celebrate the greatest liberation from slavery to sin.
- Our day of rest is not to oppress us, but liberate us. "The Sabbath was not made for man, but man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27)" (DD 63).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

How does Sunday make us better persons?

How is Sunday a day of joy, rest, and concern for our neighbor?

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

- Sunday Mass has not replaced the Old Testament Sabbath. Rather the Eucharist has fulfilled the Sabbath, because we celebrate the long awaited Messiah who has accomplished the work of our salvation.
- Therefore, we recognize the continuity between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.
- From our New Testament perspective, we see that the Sabbath day of rest was commanded for our benefit to rest from labor and rediscover our creation in the image and likeness of God (DD 59-61).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

- It is important for Sunday to be a day of rest so we might have sufficient time to keep the Lord's Day holy.
- The need for rest is written into human nature, as is often recognized even by secular persons.
- However, advances within our society make it more difficult to find time to rest. Some persons are obliged to work excessive hours including Sunday.
- It is incumbent on society to protect the rights of workers to have their day of rest (cf. Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891) (DD 64-66).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

The fruits of Sunday rest:

- Daily concerns find their proper perspective.
- Material worries give way to spiritual values.
- We see the true face of the people around us.
- The beauty of nature is rediscovered and enjoyed.
- We focus on living in peace with God and with others.

We are obliged to arrange our Sunday rest so we can participate in the Eucharist. We must refrain from work and activities which are incompatible with the sanctification of the Lord's Day (DD 67).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

- Rest should not degenerate into emptiness or boredom. Rest should offer spiritual enrichment, greater freedom, opportunities for contemplation and fraternal communion.
- We should choose forms of culture and entertainment which are in keeping with the Gospel. Thus, Sunday rest should affirm the dignity of the person as created by God.
- Sunday should also be a day of Love, a day to be concerned about works of mercy, charity, and the apostolate.
- Our love for one another is expressed (among other ways) in offerings dedicated to the poor. Sunday is a day to be concerned especially for the needy (DD 68-71).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

Sunday is not simply a time to be alone. Rather, we should be concerned about the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

John Paul II says,

- Around you may be sick people, elderly people, children or immigrants who precisely on Sundays feel more keenly their isolation, needs and suffering. Why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick, providing food for needy families, spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity: these would certainly be ways of bringing into people's lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table (DD 72).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

- Sunday Eucharist, and indeed the entire Lord's Day is a time for charity, justice, and peace.
- Doing good is always permitted on the Lord's Day.
- We follow Christ who came "to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives and new sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19) (DD 73).

IV: DIES HOMINIS

Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

Questions for personal reflection:

- *How do we experience Sunday joy?*
- *How do we observe Sabbath rest as a true liberation, and not merely a legalistic requirement?*
- *Societal pressures tend to invade Sunday rest. What should society do to protect Sunday?*
- *How should we actively and heroically safeguard the Lord's Day?*
- *What fruits do we experience from Sunday rest?*
- *How are we concerned with the needs of others on Sunday? How can we share our Sunday joy with others?*

V: DIES DIERUM

Sunday: the Primordial Feast

How does Christ reign throughout all time?

How is time consecrated by Christ?

V: DIES DIERUM

Sunday: the Primordial Feast

- Christ is present throughout time. Through Him, all things were made. In the fullness of time, Christ entered the world through the Incarnation. At the end of time, Christ will return to bring all things to the Father.
- Christ is the Alpha and the Omega. All time belongs to Him.
- Sunday cuts through time and points us to the expectation of the Lord's second coming.
- The mystery of Christ is also celebrated throughout the entire liturgical year, unfolding the various aspects of Christ's revelation through time (DD 74-79).

Conclusion

- Sunday looks to the future, to that unending Sunday of the heavenly Jerusalem, which "has no need of the sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev 21:23) (DD 84).
- The Church is always sustained by the Holy Spirit, but especially on Sunday when the Spirit lavishly gives us his gifts (DD 85).
- Mary is always present in the Church's Sunday. When we hear the word proclaimed, let us learn from her to keep it and ponder it in our hearts (cf. Lk 2:19) (DD 86).

Conclusion

- It is important for us to preserve the fundamental significance of Sunday in the observance of our faith (DD 81).
- It is important to resist a secular understanding of rest as disconnected from our worship of God (DD 82).
- Sunday is a true school, an enduring and irreplaceable program of Church pedagogy. In our fragmented society, it is vital for the Christian to come together on Sundays with fellow believers to strengthen one another (DD 83).

For Further Study

- Thursday, August 25, 2011 at 7:00 PM in the Music Room.
- Please download the Study Questions.
- You can also find a copy of the document at this site as well.

www.jgray.org/scripture/dd.html