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Ordinary Time: Sunday, the Lord's Day and Day of Joy

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Sunday is a special day. It draws us out of the routine of days that can sometimes seem all the same. On Sunday we can do very different things, but what characterizes this day is that it is a gift from our Lord

so that we might draw closer to him and, with him, celebrate his Resurrection: the event that brought us a new life. Saint John Paul II invited us to rediscover Sunday as a special time for God. *“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. He is the One who knows the secret of time and the secret of eternity, and he gives us ‘his day’ as an ever new gift of his love.”*[1]

This day can appropriately be called the “the weekly Easter,”[2] providing a framework for the other six days of the week. Sunday is “the foundation and the kernel of the whole liturgical year.”[3] That is why the Roman Pontiffs have insisted that Sunday should be celebrated with diligent care. “We go to Mass every Sunday because that is the day of the resurrection of the Lord. That is why Sunday is so important to us.”[4]

Sanctified by the Eucharist

From the beginning of Christianity Sunday always had special importance. “By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of the Lord’s day or Sunday.”[5] The Lord speaks to his People in a special way on this day. *I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,*[6] says the seer in the Apocalypse. It is the day on which Christians gather together *to break bread,*[7] as we read in Acts in reference to the community at Troas. By celebrating the Eucharist together believers were united to the saving Passion of Christ. They thus fulfilled the command to safeguard this memorial, and passed it on to successive generations of Christians

as a most precious treasure. *“Ego enim accepi a Domino, quod et tradidi vobis...”* For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, Saint Paul said to the Corinthians: *as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*[8]

The Apology of Saint Justin Martyr to the Roman emperor, in the middle of the second century, reveals the Church’s growing awareness of the breadth of the significance of Sunday. “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day, when God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.”[9] These two marvelous divine works form, as it were, a single reredos with the risen Christ at the center, for he is the source of the renewal of all things. That is why the Church

prays in the Easter Vigil: “May the whole world know and see that what was cast down is raised up, what had become old is made new, and all things are restored to integrity through Christ, just as by him they came into being.”[10]

The celebration of Sunday has a festive tone because Christ has conquered sin, and he wants to conquer sin in us. He wants to break the bonds that separate us from him, that enclose us in selfishness and isolation. And so we join in the Church’s jubilant exclamation for this day in the Liturgy of the Hours: *Hæc est dies, quam fecit Dominus: exsulemus et lætemur in ea.*[11] This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad! We experience the joy of knowing that through Baptism we are made members of Christ, who joins us to himself in glorifying the Father, offering him

our petitions and our desires to improve.

The joy brought by this encounter with our Lord and Savior is not individualistic. We always celebrate it in union with the whole Church. At Sunday Mass we strengthen our ties to the other members of our Christian community so that we become *one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.*^[12] Hence “the Sunday assembly is the privileged place of unity,”^[13] and especially so for families, who live “one of the most outstanding expressions of their identity and their ‘ministry’ as ‘domestic churches,’ when parents share with their children at the one table of the Word and of the Bread of Life.”^[14] What a beautiful picture we have every Sunday when in the

parishes and various places of worship we find Christian families gathered together—father, mother, children, even the grandparents—to adore God and grow in faith together!

Becoming richer in God's word

The festive character of Sunday is reflected in several liturgical elements such as a second reading before the Gospel, the homily, the profession of faith and, except on the Sundays of Advent and Lent, the Gloria. Of course, it is highly recommended to have singing at Sunday Mass, to reflect the Church's joy in commemorating our Lord's Resurrection.

The Sunday Liturgy of the Word contains great riches, with the proclamation of the Gospel at the center. During Ordinary Time and throughout the three-year cycle, the Church sets before the faithful an

orderly selection of Gospel texts reviewing our Lord's life. "In order to bring out the unity between the Old and the New Testaments,"^[15] the first reading from the Old Testament during Ordinary Time is related to the Gospel so that we might recall the history of our elder brothers and sisters in the faith. The second reading throughout the three years is taken from the letters of Saint Paul and Saint James and helps us understand how the first Christians lived in accord with the new way of life Jesus has brought us.

The Church as a good Mother provides us with abundant spiritual nourishment from the Word of God. This should prompt each of us to adopt a prayerful attitude during Mass and then to bring it into our life. Pope Francis says: "I think we can all improve a bit in this respect: by becoming better listeners of the Word of God, in order to be less rich

in our own words and richer in his words.”[16] To help us assimilate this nourishment, each Sunday the priest gives a homily in which he explains the significance of the readings, especially the Gospel, in light of the paschal mystery: a scene from Christ’s life, his dialogue with those around him, his saving teachings. The homily thus leads us to take part intensely in the Eucharistic Liturgy and to understand that what we celebrate points beyond the Mass and should transform our daily life: our work, study, family....

More than a precept, a necessity

The Holy Mass is a necessity for a Christian. Vatican II teaches: “*Quoties sacrificium crucis, quo ‘Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus’ in altari celebratur, opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur.* – As often as the sacrifice of the cross by which ‘Christ our Pasch is sacrificed’ (1 Cor

5:7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.”[17] How, then, could we possibly do without it?

The sanctifying value of the Mass is not limited to the time of its celebration. It extends to all our thoughts, words and actions in such a way that “we can consider the Mass as the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life.”[18] Saint Josemaria continued: “We may have asked ourselves, at one time or another, how we can correspond to the greatness of God’s love. We may have wanted to see a program for Christian living clearly explained. The answer is easy, and it is within reach of all the faithful: to participate lovingly in the holy Mass, to learn to deepen our personal relationship with God in the sacrifice that summarizes all that Christ asks of us.”[19]

“Sine Dominico non possumus: we cannot live without the Lord’s Supper,” said the third-century martyrs of Abitina.[20] The Church has specified this need in the precept to take part in the Mass every Sunday and on the other holy days of obligation.[21] By doing so, we fulfill the commandment in the Decalogue: *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.*[22] Christians fulfill this precept’s deepest meaning when we celebrate Sunday, the day of Jesus’ Resurrection.

Sunday Rest

Sunday ought to be sanctified in honor of the Lord. We direct our eyes to our Creator and rest from our habitual work, as the Bible teaches us: *In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in*

them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.[23] Even though having one day of the week for rest can be justified for purely human reasons, as good for the person, the family and all society, we must not forget that the divine command goes beyond this. “The divine rest of the seventh day does not allude to an inactive God, but emphasizes the fullness of what has been accomplished. It speaks, as it were, of God’s lingering before the ‘very good’ work (*Gen 1:31*) which his hand has wrought, in order to cast upon it a *gaze full of joyous delight.*”[24]

In the Old Testament, revelation adds another reason for sanctifying the seventh day: *For remember that you too were once slaves in Egypt, and the Lord, your God, brought you from there with his strong hand and outstretched arm. That is why the Lord, your God, has commanded you*

to observe the Sabbath day.[25]

Because the glorious resurrection of Christ is the perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and the culminating moment in the history of salvation which began at the dawn of the human race, the early Christians celebrated the day of the week on which Christ rose as their weekly feast day, sanctified in the Lord's honor.

The miraculous freeing of the Israelites is a figure of what Christ does for his Church through the paschal mystery: he frees us from sin, he helps us overcome our evil inclinations. That is why we can say that Sunday is a special day for living in the freedom of the children of God: a freedom that leads us to adore the Father and to practice Christian fraternity, beginning with those closest to us.

“Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live.”[26] It is not a matter of doing nothing or things of little worth. Rather, “the institution of the Lord’s Day helps everyone enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious lives.”[27] It is a day to give to family members the special time and attention that perhaps we sometimes fail to devote to them on the other days of the week.

Finally, Sunday is not a day reserved to oneself, to spend on one’s personal likes and interests. “From the Sunday Mass there flows a tide of charity destined to spread into the whole life of the faithful, beginning by inspiring

the very way in which they live the rest of Sunday. If Sunday is a day of joy, Christians should declare by their actual behavior that we cannot be happy 'on our own.' They look around to find people who may need their help."[28]

Sunday Mass is a force that spurs us to get out of ourselves because the Eucharist is the sacrament of charity, of love for God and neighbor for the sake of God. "On Sunday," Saint Josemaria said, "it is good to praise the Trinity: glory be to the Father, glory be to the Son, glory be to the Holy Spirit. And I usually add: glory be to Holy Mary; and (a childish thing, but I don't mind telling you) also to Saint Joseph."[29]

[1] Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini*, 31 May 1998, no. 7.

[2] Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 6 January 2001, no. 35.

[3] Vatican II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 106.

[4] Pope Francis, Audience, 5 February 2014.

[5] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 106.

[6] *Rev* 1:10.

[7] *Acts* 20:7.

[8] *I Cor* 11:23, 26.

[9] *Apology*, I, 67, 7.

[10] Roman Missal, *Easter Vigil*, Prayer after the 7th reading.

[11] *Psalms* 117 (118), 24.

[12] *Eph* 4:4-6.

[13] *Dies Domini*, no. 36.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass, no. 106.

[16] Pope Francis, Speech, 4 October 2013.

[17] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 3.

[18] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 87.

[19] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 88.

[20] Cf. *Dies Domini*, no. 46.

[21] Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1247.

[22] *Ex* 20:8-10.

[23] *Ex* 20:11.

[24] *Dies Domini*, no. 11.

[25] *Deut* 5:15.

[26] *Dies Domini*, no. 67.

[27] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,
no. 2184.

[28] *Dies Domini*, no. 72.

[29] Saint Josemaria, notes taken in a
family get-together, 29 May 1974.

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