

The Day of The Lord

One of the great challenges for many Canadian Christian families is the capacity to keep Sunday as a Day of Rest and a Day of Worship. The busyness of life and the constant flow of activity often mean that Sunday looks no different than any other day of the week. As a consequence, much of what is critical to being healthy, holy and happy human beings is lost. Without recognizing the gift of Sunday, we run the risk of losing ourselves in a world focused on consumption, productivity and want. In his 1998 Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini* (The Day of the Lord) Pope John Paul II called Christians to a renewed appreciation for God's gift of Sunday. According to the late pontiff, Sunday enables men and women to pause to reflect and to celebrate that which has already been achieved and accomplished in their lives and work. This weekly posture is what begins to move each and every person from thinking and believing they never have enough, to a realization of what has been given and what blessings are in fact present in life. Sunday is a day to celebrate God's work and activity in every aspect of human life.

Why Sunday? For Christians Sunday is the Day of the Risen Lord. In the Synoptic Gospels we are told Sunday is the day that the Lord rose from the dead. Throughout the New Testament the Risen Lord appears to his disciples on Sunday. Sunday continues to be, for believers, the day to gather together and celebrate Jesus, who is risen from the dead and living among us.

The Eucharistic Assembly: the Heart of Sunday In *Dies Domini* we read, "Those who have received the grace of Baptism are not saved as individuals alone, but as members of the Mystical Body, having become part of the People of God. It is important therefore that they come together to express fully the very identity of the Church, the *ekklesia*." In a world of radical individualism it is not an easy task to follow the call to be a people whose identity is found in coming together. Yet it is only when we gather together to celebrate the Eucharist that we can be church, a sacramental sign of Christ's presence in the world. Sunday, therefore, in addition to being The Day of the Lord is also The Day of the Church. On Sunday we have a need to come together with fellow believers so that we might be a source of strength and support for each other.

Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity Sunday is a day of restoration. It is a day to reclaim those things that are most important in our lives. It is easy to lose sight of the good and the beautiful; easy to find little joy in life. When Sunday is understood and embraced as God's special gift to us, then it becomes the way to begin each and every new week. In his 1891 Encyclical entitled *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII wrote of the worker's right to Sunday and the state's obligation to guarantee that right. To-day there remains the same obligation to ensure that all people can enjoy the freedom, rest and relaxation which human dignity requires. Recently Pope Benedict XVI recalled the 12th-century writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who warned against "the dangers of excessive activity." St. Bernard had criticized the reigning pontiff of his time, Pope Eugenius III, for "losing himself" in his many activities and forgetting the primacy of prayer and contemplation. The saint's provocative comments are well worth remembering today, "This warning is valid for every kind of occupation," the pope said. Sunday is the day to invite to a meal people who are alone, to visit the sick, to provide food for needy families, to spend a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity. Sunday, lived in this way, ensures that not only the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, but the whole day, becomes a great school of charity, justice and peace.

Sunday is the Day of the Great Procession Each Eucharistic celebration begins with procession. The movement from our homes to our church, down the aisle to the Eucharistic table. The procession is never simply about moving from one place to another but is a profession of who we are and ultimately where we are headed. Each procession reveals who we are as church. Looking at the procession reveals who is part of this community and who is included in the journey. The procession tells us something about our destiny, the Kingdom of Heaven. The joy, the music and the dance anticipate what heaven is all about. Each Sunday we are called to join in the Great Procession of God's People who make their way from lives of individuality to lives of community. As each person joins in the perpetual movement of the Church's procession, our lives and our world are transformed by the vision of heaven.

For further reflection: A copy of John Paul II's 1998 Apostolic Letter entitled "Dies Domini" can be found at www.vatican.va