
REDISCOVERING SUNDAY (3)



In writing to us about the *"Day of the Lord,"* Pope John Paul II reminds us that Sunday is a celebration of the works of the Creator, the Day of the Risen Lord and of the Gift of the Spirit, a day of joy, rest, and solidarity. He also points out how the eucharistic gathering is at the heart of the Day of the Lord in a very special way.

A SPECIAL PRESENCE

"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20). This promise of Christ never ceases to resound in the Church as the fertile secret of her life and the wellspring of her hope. As the day of the Resurrection, Sunday is not only the remembrance of a past event: it is a celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord among his own people.

IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH

For his presence to be properly proclaimed and lived, it is not enough for disciples of Christ to pray individually and commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ inwardly, in the secret of their hearts. 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. [Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 9] it is important therefore that they come together to express fully the very identity of the Church, the *ekklesia*, the assembly called together by the Risen Lord who offered his life *"to reunite the scattered children of God"* (Jn. 1:52). They have become one in Christ through the gift of the Spirit. This unity becomes visible when Christians gather together: it is then that they come to know clearly and testify to the world that they are the people redeemed, drawn *"from every tribe and language and people and nation"* (Rev. 5:9). The assembly of Christ's disciples embodies from age to age the image of the first Christian community which Luke sets as example in the *Acts of the Apostles*, when he tells that the first believers *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers"* (2:42).

THE EUCHARISTIC GATHERING

The Eucharist is not only a particularly intense expression of the reality of the Church's life, but also in a sense its fountain-head. The Eucharist nourishes and forms the Church: *"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"* (1 Cor. 10:17). Because of this vital link with the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the mystery of the Church is treasured, proclaimed, and lived supremely in the Eucharist.

AT THE HEART OF LIFE

This ecclesial dimension which is intrinsic to the Eucharist is realised in every Eucharistic celebration. But it is expressed most especially on that day when the whole community comes together to commemorate the Lord's

Resurrection. Significantly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (N^o. 2177) teaches that *"the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life."* [N^o. 2177]

THE EIGHTH DAY

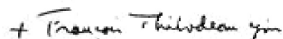
At Sunday Mass Christians relive with particular intensity the experience of the Apostles on the evening of Easter when the Risen Lord appeared to them as they were gathered together. In a sense, the People of God of all times were present in that small nucleus of disciples, the first fruits of the Church. Through their testimony, every generation of believers hears Christ's greeting, rich with the messianic gift of peace won by his blood and offered with his Spirit: *"Peace be with you!"* Christ's return among them *"a week later"* (Jn. 20:26) can be seen as a radical prefiguring of the Christian community's practice of coming together every seven days on "the Lord's Day" or Sunday, in order to profess its faith in his Resurrection and to receive the blessing he has promised: *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe"* (Jn. 20:29).

RESURRECTION AND EUCHARIST

This close connection between the appearance of the Risen Lord and the Eucharist is suggested in the Gospel of Luke in the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, whom Christ approached and led to understand the Scriptures and then sat with them at table. They recognised him when *"he took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them"* (24:30). The gestures of Jesus in this account are his gestures at the Last Supper, with a clear allusion to the "breaking of bread," as the Eucharist was called by the first generation of Christians.

THE SUNDAY EUCHARIST

It is true that in itself the Sunday Eucharist is no different from that celebrated on other days, nor can it be separated from liturgical and sacramental life as a whole. By its very nature, the Eucharist is an epiphany of the Church, [Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus Quintus Annus* (4 December 1988), 9] and this is most powerfully expressed when the diocesan community gathers in prayer with its shepherd: *"the Church appears with special clarity when the holy People of God, all of them, are actively and fully sharing in the same liturgical celebrations - especially when it is the same Eucharist - sharing one prayer at one altar, at which the Bishop is presiding, surrounded by his presbyters and his ministers."* [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41; Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 15] This relationship with the Bishop and with the entire Church community is inherent in every Eucharistic celebration, even when the Bishop does not preside, regardless of the day of the week on which it is celebrated. Mention of the Bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer is an indication of this. But because of the special solemnity and the obligatory presence of the community, and because it is celebrated *"on the day when Christ conquered death and gave us a share in his immortal life,"* the Sunday Eucharist expresses with greater emphasis its inherent ecclesial dimension. It becomes the paradigm for other Eucharistic celebrations. Have a good Sunday!



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