

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

WHY GO TO SUNDAY MASS?

From the general audience of Pope Francis on Wednesday, 13 December 2017

TODAY WE ASK OURSELVES: *WHY GO TO SUNDAY MASS?* The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2177). We Christians go to Sunday Mass to encounter the Risen Lord, or better still to allow ourselves to be encountered by him, to hear his Word, to nourish ourselves at his table, and thus to become the Church, that is, his mystical living Body in the world.

From the first hour, Jesus' disciples understood this; they celebrated the Eucharistic encounter with the Lord on the day of the week that the Hebrews called "the first of the week" and the Romans called "day of the sun", because *on that day Jesus rose from the dead* and appeared to the disciples, speaking with them, eating with them, giving them the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:1; Mk 16:9, 14; Lk 24:1, 13; Jn 20:1, 19), as we have heard in the Gospel reading. The great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost also happened on a Sunday, the 50th day after Jesus' Resurrection. For these reasons, Sunday is a holy day for us, sanctified by the Eucharistic celebration, the living presence of the Lord among us and for us. Thus, it is the Mass that *makes* Sunday Christian. The Christian Sunday revolves around the Mass. For a Christian, what is a Sunday in which the encounter with the Lord is lacking? (There are Christian communities which, unfortunately, cannot enjoy Mass every Sunday; they too, however, on this holy day, are called to reflect in prayer in the name of the Lord, listening to the Word of God and keeping alive the desire for the Eucharist.)

Some secularized societies have lost the Christian sense of Sunday illuminated by the Eucharist. This is a shame! In these contexts it is necessary to revive this awareness, to recover the meaning of the celebration, the meaning of the joy, of the parish community, of solidarity, of the rest which restores body and soul (cf. ccc, nn. 2177-2178). Of all these values, the Eucharist is our guide, Sunday after Sunday. For this reason the Second Vatican Council wished to emphasize that Sunday "is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106).

The Sunday abstention from work did not exist in the

early centuries: it is a specific contribution of Christianity. According to biblical tradition Jews rest on the Sabbath, while in Roman society a day of the week was not provided for abstention from servile labour. It was the Christian awareness of living as children and not as slaves, inspired by the Eucharist, which has made Sunday — almost universally — the day of rest. Without Christ we are condemned to be dominated by everyday weariness, with its worries, and by fear of the future. The Sunday encounter with the Lord gives us the strength to experience the present with confidence and courage, and to go forth with hope. For this reason we Christians go to encounter the Lord on Sunday, in the Eucharistic celebration.

Eucharistic communion with Jesus, Risen and ever-Living, anticipates the Sunday without sunset, when there will be no more weariness nor pain, nor sorrow nor tears, but only the joy of living fully and forever with the Lord. Sunday Mass also speaks to us of this blessed repose, teaching us to entrust ourselves during the course of the week to the hands of the Father who is in heaven.

How can we respond to those who say that it is of no use going to Mass, even on Sunday, because the important thing is to live well, to love our neighbor? It is true that the quality of Christian life is measured by the capacity to love, as Jesus said: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35); but how can we practice the Gospel without drawing the energy necessary to do so, one Sunday after another, from the inexhaustible source of the Eucharist? We do not go to Mass in order to give something to God, but *to receive what we truly need from him*. We are reminded of this by the Church's prayer, which is addressed to God in this way: "although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation" (*Roman Missal*, Common Preface iv).

In conclusion, why do we go to Mass on Sundays? It is not enough to respond that it is a precept of the Church; this helps to preserve its value, but alone does not suffice. We Christians need to participate in Sunday Mass because only with Jesus' grace, with his living presence within us and among us, can we put his commandment into practice, and thus be his credible witnesses.