



Allocutio



Presentata Curia 25th August 2011

Allocutio: Sunday Mass

On 31st May 1998 Pope John Paul issued an Apostolic Letter entitled the *Lord's Day*. It is a letter about the meaning of the day and its spirit and gives many reasons why it is special. It is a day to celebrate God's creation, the day of rest, the day of Resurrection which makes the Eucharist so special that day and the day which points to the future. Let's look at that day.

It is the day the Lord has made and so is a day of rejoicing. That is the tone and mood of that day. It is so because it is the day the women came away from the tomb rejoicing, it is the day the hearts of two disciples on the road to Emmaus burnt within them, it is the day when after they saw the Lord in the upper room the disciples were filled with joy.

The Resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental event upon which Christian faith rests. It is a wondrous event which is unique in human history. It is not just that we remember a past event; it is the celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his people. And it is that meeting with him that is the cause of our joy. But interlaced with it are other themes from the Jewish Sabbath which now take on new meaning.

Christ's Resurrection renewed creation and lifted the meaning of creation to a new level. The Genesis account of creation is a hymn of praise to the Creator. We celebrate on Sundays what God created as good and now made even greater by Christ. Coming from God's hand the whole Cosmos is beautiful and bears the imprint of God's goodness. And the highpoint is the creation of man and woman. So we thank God for humanity and rejoice over all that is good in humanity. So Sunday is well celebrated if we enjoy the creation including other people. It is not a day for Calvinistic glumness!

This brings us to the day of rest. God rested on the Sabbath day after he had completed the high point of his creation: humanity. But God's rest is not one of inactivity. He gazes on what he has made and loves it. "It is a gaze which God casts on all things but in a special way upon man, the crown of creation. It is a gaze which already discloses something of the nuptial shape of the relationship which God wants to establish with the creature made in his own image, by calling that creature to enter a pact of love." And so the Lord's Day is a day of rest from other things so that we may prepare for the wedding Feast of the Lamb, the mystical wedding of Christ and his Bride. If couples must make quality time for their relationship how much more must we find time to take out for God!



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“The faithful are asked to rest not only as God rested but to rest in the Lord, bringing the entire creation to him, in praise and thanksgiving ...”

But all reaches its fullest expression in the Death and Resurrection of Christ. St Gregory the Great declares, “For us the true Sabbath is the person of the Redeemer, our Lord, Jesus Christ!” Pope Innocent I, “We celebrate Sunday because of the venerable Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ”. John Paul says, “In the light of this constant and universal tradition, it is clear that, although the Lord’s Day is rooted in the very work of creation and even more in the mystery of biblical rest of God, it is nevertheless to the Resurrection of Christ that we must look to in order to understand fully the Lord’s Day.”

In early days Christians linked quickly the Resurrection and the idea of the new creation. The 8th day begins anew the work of the first and raised it to a new level. But that in turn points to a new day of rest out there before us. In celebrating Sunday, both the 1st and the 8th day, the Christian is led towards the goal of eternal life.

The Romans called it the day of the sun. Christians jumped on that too and saw Christ as the new Sun, the light of the world, a light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, a light to enlighten the Gentiles.

It was also seen as a day of faith. Gathered in his presence in the Sunday assembly, believers sense themselves called like Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Put out your hand and place it in my side. Doubt no longer but believe.” Listening to the Word and receiving the Body of Christ the baptised contemplate the Risen Christ present in the holy signs and confess with the Apostle, “My Lord and my God”.

If there is any day Christians should gather it has to be Sunday because of his Resurrection. 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. The Emmaus story of the two disciples who recognise the Lord in the breaking of bread connects the Eucharist and the Risen Christ. The Sunday Eucharist is no different from the Eucharist celebrated other days. “But because of its 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 immortal life, the Sunday Eucharist expresses with greater emphasis its inherent ecclesial dimension.” On Sunday the whole Christian community should gather the memory of the week’s events and thank God for all that has gone well. But with Christ too we offer to God all the burdens of the week united with his sacrifice.

Sunday, the weekly Easter, makes clearer the meaning of time. Sunday has nothing to do with those cosmic cycles of natural religion. Springing from the



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Resurrection the Christian Sunday cuts through human time, the months, the years, the centuries, like a directional arrow which points towards the second coming. “In fact everything that will happen until the end of the world will be no more than an extension and unfolding of what happened on the day when the battered body of the Crucified Lord was raised by the power of the Spirit ... Not only the Church but the cosmos itself and history are ceaselessly ruled and governed by the glorified Christ. It is this life force which propels creation, groaning in birth pangs until now (RM 8:22), towards the goal of its full redemption. Mankind can have only a faint intuition of this process, but Christians have the key and the certainty. Keeping Sunday holy is the important witness which they are called to bear, so that every stage of human history will be upheld by hope.”

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill