

SUNDAY: THE HEART OF THE WEEK

by Eliot Kapitan

When I was growing up, “Sunday best” described the special clothes and behaviors reserved for the first day of the week. This meant good shirt, dress pants, hard shoes, and the best manners. The usual three meals of weekdays were replaced by two bigger and more festive meals on Sundays, which were planned week by week so that the whole family could sit together at table. Sunday was also the time for extended family gatherings, for special events, or for traveling to surrounding towns for festivals and church suppers.

HOW THE CHURCH PRAYS

The Christian community has always had a “Sunday best” attitude concerning the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week. These Sunday liturgies employ a full complement of ministers, the best music and song, art and flowers, Scripture proclamation and preaching, communion under both kinds, and sometimes special blessings and prayers that the parish can provide. The people come to worship God. They come to both be the Body of Christ and to eat and drink of it in gratitude. They come to the church to gather as the Church and to do what the Church does best.

WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES BY PRAYING

The Church is at its best when it prays, and especially on Sunday. The Church has always held Sunday in great esteem because, as the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* notes: “The Church celebrates the paschal mystery on the first day of the week, known as the Lord’s Day or Sunday. This follows a tradition handed down from the apostles

and having its origin from the day of Christ’s resurrection.

Thus Sunday must be ranked as the first holy day of all” [no. 4]. Sunday, for the Christian, is the first holy day of all because:

- it is the day when Jesus Christ rose from the dead;
- on it we recall the whole paschal mystery of Christ;
- on that day we celebrate the salvation of all humanity by the dead-but-risen Christ in hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist; and
- it reminds us who we are (Christian) and to whom we belong (God in Christ).

Sunday, then, is the very heart of the week and the foundation for the whole liturgical year.

WHAT THE CHURCH LEARNS BY BELIEVING

Since Sunday is the heart of the week, it pumps life into every day that follows. More and more religious formation is now based on the Bible as organized for Sunday in the *Lectionary for Mass* and on the seasons of the liturgical year. The seasons are structured by the number of Sundays each contains.

The vast majority of Catholics are formed by keeping Sunday holy. That is why catechumens preparing to be baptized begin by gathering on Sunday to be shaped by God’s holy word. Christ is present whenever the Scriptures are proclaimed in the Church gathered. And Christ is present whenever those belonging to him in baptism (or those longing to) gather for prayer and catechesis (see the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 75-89).

That is why our children and youth must be continually trained and formed by the Sunday celebration. Parish schools and once-a-week religious education models have a fundamental role in helping all to grasp the significance and share in the joy of Sunday.

Regardless of the program, religious education can help instill the central importance of Sunday in some easy ways.

- Give time each day or week to recall one aspect of the previous Sunday.
- Use one of the opening prayers.
- Use one of the four Biblical texts (a new one each day).
- Ask the parish musician to give you the Sunday music list or to highlight suitable age-specific liturgical songs. Or go to the web site of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians (<http://www.npm.org>), select “Resources,” then “Planning Calendar,” then the Sunday desired for a long list of suitable music.
- Proclaim aloud one of the readings. Then do some faith sharing: (1) What do you remember most from this reading? (2) Why is that important to you? (3) How does the story make you feel? (4) What is Jesus or God asking the people in the story to do? And what do you think about that? (5) What does this tell us about Jesus, about the kind of person he is, about what he wants? (6) Who do you like most in the story? (7) What might Jesus be asking you/us to do now?
- The catechist, in two or three sentences, can sum this up by completing: “Because of this reading and our sharing, this is what Catholics believe (or know to be true). . . .”
- End in prayer, using the style of the prayer of the faithful, or a simple sung acclamation.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

These Church documents provide a good foundation for appreciating Sunday:

- *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, nos. 47-49, 56, 102, and 106;
- *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*;
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1163-1167, 1341-1344, and 2174-2188;
- John Paul II, *Dies domini: On Keeping the Lord’s Day Holy* (1998).

These additional books help the reader understand a given Sunday so that its message can be carried into the days that follow:

- *At Home with the Word* (Liturgy Training Publications, annual);
- *Living the Word: Scripture Reflections and Commentaries for Sundays and Holy Days* (World Library Publications, annual);
- *Living the Good News*, Catholic version – age specific and intergenerational materials (Morehouse, quarterly);
- Mary Ellen Hynes, *Companion to the Calendar* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

The object of all catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ (see the *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 80). Rereading the stories of Sunday throughout the week helps us treasure God’s word, helps us treasure Christ who is present and alive today. Looking back to Sunday is a faithful way to keep Christ in our mind and hearts.