

of the Christian life. From the beginning of my pontificate, I have not ceased to repeat: ‘Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ!’. In the same way, today I would strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday: *Do not be afraid to give your time to Christ!* Yes, let us open our time to Christ, that he may cast light upon it and give it direction. He is the One who knows the secret of time and the secret of eternity, and he gives us ‘his day’ as an ever-new gift of his love. The rediscovery of this day is a grace, which we must implore, not only so that we may live the demands of faith to the full, but also so that we may respond concretely to the deepest human yearnings. Time given to Christ is never time lost, but is rather time gained, so that our relationships and indeed our whole life may become more profoundly human.”

The Holy Father went on to say:

“Sharing in the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday, but the duty to keep Sunday holy cannot be reduced to this. In fact, the Lord’s Day is lived well if it is marked from beginning to end by grateful and active remembrance of God’s saving work. This commits each of Christ’s disciples to shape the other moments of the day — those outside the liturgical context: family life, social relationships, moments of relaxation — in such a way that the peace and joy of the Risen Lord will emerge in the ordinary events of life. For example, the relaxed gathering of parents and children can be an opportunity not only to listen to one another but also to share a few formative and more reflective moments. Even in lay life, when possible, why not make provision for special *times of prayer* — especially the solemn celebration of Vespers, for example — or *moments of catechesis*, which on the eve of Sunday or on Sunday afternoon might

prepare for or complete the gift of the Eucharist in people’s hearts?

“This rather traditional way of keeping Sunday holy has perhaps become more difficult for many people; but the Church shows her faith in the strength of the Risen Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit by making it known that, today more than ever, she is unwilling to settle for minimalism and mediocrity at the level of faith. She wants to help Christians to do what is most correct and pleasing to the Lord. And despite the difficulties, there are positive and encouraging signs. In many parts of the Church, a new need for prayer in its many forms is being felt; and this is a gift of the Holy Spirit. There is also a rediscovery of ancient religious practices, such as pilgrimages; and often the faithful take advantage of Sunday rest to visit a Shrine where, with the whole family perhaps, they can spend time in a more intense experience of faith. These are moments of grace, which must be fostered through evangelization and guided by genuine pastoral wisdom (§52).

It is most strongly recommend that every Christian take the time to read the words and study the recommendations of the Holy Father in *Dies Domini*.

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## **Dies Domini The Lord’s Day**

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The Jewish Sabbath was the weekly day of rest. The importance of Sabbath-keeping is made clear in the Decalogue: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8-11).

The precept of observing the Saturday Sabbath was set-aside in the Christian Church. In the Book of Revelation, we find a special name for the first day of the week, “the Lord’s day (1:10). In Acts 20:7 we are told that St. Paul spent seven days at Troas, and that on the first day of the week the disciples came together to “break bread”. The custom of the New Testament church was to meet for worship on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day. St. Paul also wrote to the Corinthians, “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come.” These words directly imply that Sunday was already a special or sacred day, on which deeds of love were especially suitable. Heb 10:25 indicates that, at the time of its writing, Christians had regular days of assembly.

The first day of the week was selected and held sacred because the Lord Himself had sanctified it by His resurrection, and had further emphasized it by an appearance to the disciples

and again by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which that year was also the first day of the week.

The Lord's Day is, in a special sense, the feast of life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not merely the raising to life of an individual man but of human nature. All that was true in the spiritual content for the observance of the Mosaic commandment for the use of the Sabbath day is found in the Lord's Day and more. The church professed to be a divine development of Judaism (Acts 24:14). All that was eternally true in the law is with us still and that which was essentially transitory was tolerated until its uselessness was seen and it passed away. The present rule obliges the faithful to attend Mass on Sunday and to rest from servile work, *i.e.* work done with the hands rather than with the head. But custom permits certain servile work even when not required by necessity or mercy, such as cooking food.

It is well known that the earliest Fathers consistently spoke of the assembly for worship, and especially for the celebration of the Eucharist. These authors spoke of Sunday, which was called the "Lord's Day," the "Day of the Lord's Resurrection," and sometimes, when addressing heathens, the "Day of the Sun", as a day of joy and prayer. The ancient Church required the better part of the day to be spent in prayer.

Undoubtedly many Jewish Christians at first observed both the Jewish Sabbath and the Lord's Day. St. Paul's custom was, it seems, often to observe both days, for he entered the Jewish synagogues and preached there on the Sabbath days and he also met with the distinctively Christian congregations on the Lord's Day. It was doubtless also customary at first for the Christians to meet daily (Acts 2:42, 46), but this might have been early in the morning or at night before and after the day's work was done. In

addition to the ordinary Jewish worship, at first, at stated hours in the temple, the disciples met daily in groups in private houses. At these meetings they sat at the table together and partook of a common meal, the Agape or love feast. At the close of this repast, whosoever presided consecrated the bread and wine as Jesus had done at the last supper and shared it with the community. This was the primitive form of the Mass.

The emphasis in regard to the times of meeting was not upon the "obligation" but upon the "love" of doing so. There is a vast difference between a person keeping one day a week sacred because he or she is obliged to do so by some law or custom and the observance of a holy day because it is a delight to do so. The great emphasis of New Testament teaching is upon the manifestation of the spiritual life in seeking both times and places to make known and increase that life. The early disciples when they met daily in the temple did so not because they were required to do so, but because it was a service of the heart. When Paul speaks as he does to the Galatians about the observance of days and months and years he is evidently (Gal. 4:10) trying to show them that mere observance of rules without any heart in it is not what God wants. Again, when Christ said, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27)

To those who cease from secular work upon the Lord's Day and make it a pleasure day with no attempt to build up the spiritual life, and with no seeking of God to worship Him, this day is often a positive detriment. The injunction, "let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25) and the exhortations of the early Christian writers for the observance of the Lord's Day were to the end of building up the spiritual life. Clement, Barnabas, Justin Martyr and Ignatius unite in urging their fellow

Christians to meet together often that they may retain and increase their faith in the midst of a gross heathenism and frequent severe persecutions.

When Christianity became, or was on the way to become, the religion of the state, it was necessary to pass some law of rest; otherwise a Christian who kept the Sunday observance might be called to court, or some form of state service. In addition, it protected Christians from business competition from his heathen counterpart. Hence, Constantine (275? - 337) required his subjects to rest on the feasts of our Lord. Even soldiers were exempt from work in order that they be given the day to pray.

The decrees of councils became more rigorous. The Synod of Laodicea (between 343 and 381) threatened those who followed the Jewish practice of resting on the Sabbath, with excommunication, and at the same time, exhorted Christians to rest on Sunday "if they can" (canon 29). The Second Council of Mâcon (585) desired that the faithful spent the entire day in prayer (c. 1). The Third Council of Tours in 813 (c. 40) is still more explicit; the prayer and praise is to continue "till the evening." In all these authorities and in the Fathers there is generally no confusion between Sunday and Sabbath.

Sunday used to be reckoned from evening to evening; the sanctification of the day began on Saturday and ended on Sunday evening. It wasn't until the eleventh or twelfth century that people began the celebration of Sundays and feasts on the morning of the same day.

On May 31, 1998, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic letter entitled *Dies Domini: On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*. In this extraordinary document the Holy Father decried the modern tendency to treat Sunday as just another day, and in section 7, reminds us that:

"Sunday is a day which is at the very heart