

THE PARTS OF THE MASS

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself... When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. ~ Luke 24:27, 30

AT THE LAST SUPPER, on the night when Jesus was betrayed, he instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout all time until that day that he would come again. Through the celebration of the Mass, the Church remembers his death and Resurrection, brings the saving effects of his sacrifice into the present, and nourishes her people with the Paschal Banquet in which Christ is eaten and the heart is filled with his grace.

The Mass is a celebration of the Paschal mystery of Christ. The Paschal mystery refers to his saving work accomplished by his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. A step-by-step walk through the Mass can help us understand how this central mystery of the faith is celebrated and made present every time the People of God gather to worship.

Opening Rites

Processional: The Mass begins with a processional. The altar is revered by all in procession because it represents the table of the Lord. It is the place of sacrifice, the holy place. Those in the procession include the altar servers, reader(s), a deacon if present, concelebrating priests (if any), and the main celebrant who is the priest (or bishop) that will preside over the celebration. They process in where the people are gathered, make a sign of reverence toward the altar, and take their appropriate seats.

Greeting: "[W]here two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). The priest leads the people in the sign of the cross and greets them in the name of the Lord.

Penitential Rite: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt 9:13). In order to celebrate the Mass worthily, the priest invites all those present to participate in the penitential rite, which the whole congregation carries out through a communal confession of sin and absolution from the priest. True worship

requires repentance of sin and reconciliation; we must be reconciled with God and one another. This rite can be carried out in several ways but the two most common forms are the Confiteor (which means "I confess") and the Kyrie Eleison (which means "Lord, have mercy"). Both prayers are our recognition of sin and plea for God's mercy. Confident that God never turns away a contrite heart and resting on the assurance of the Church entrusted with his mercy, the priest then leads the people in a hymn of praise.

The Gloria: "Ascribe to the Lord, O Heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy array" (Ps 29:1-2). Forgiveness of all venial sins, the people

are now ready to praise God with the great hymn called the Gloria. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased" (Lk 2:14). This is an ancient hymn of praise and thanksgiving for all God has done, is doing, and will ever do for his people. In this way, those gathered unite themselves with those in Heaven who continually worship God in the same manner: "And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen'" (Rv 7:11-12). The Gloria is either

"The Mass is a celebration of the Paschal mystery of Christ."



Wheatfield at sunset

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sung or said on all Sundays except for the seasons of Advent and Lent, on solemnities and feasts, and on special, more solemn celebrations.

Collect: *"The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer"* (Ps 6:9). After the Gloria, the priest invites the people to pray, and together with him they observe a brief silence to place themselves in the presence of God and call to mind their petitions. The priest then prays the opening prayer, also known as the *collect*, which expresses the main theme of the Mass. The priest's final words of the prayer address a petition to the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The Liturgy of the Word

"Blessed ... are those who bear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28).

Readings: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Mt 4:4). Christ is present when his Word is proclaimed, and his Word is food for the soul. Here we meet Christ at the Table of his Word. The Word of God feeds and instructs us and prepares us to receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. The first reading is usually from the Old Testament and is followed by a response from the book of Psalms in Scripture. If the celebration is a solemn one, a second reading from the New Testament other than the Gospels is read. Following these is the proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel is especially venerated because it is an account of the life of the Lord and contains the message of salvation. Frequently, the book of the Gospels is carried in procession with candles, accompanied by the singing of an Alleluia verse. The people stand while the Gospel is read.

The Homily: *"I strive ... for all ... that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are bid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Col 2:1-2). After the readings,

the bishop, priest, or deacon explains these Scriptures and encourages reflection on the Word of God in order to prepare the people's hearts and minds for the Eucharist. He exhorts the people to live by the Word that gives life.

The Profession of Faith: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God"* (Jn 6:68-69). The Profession of Faith or Creed is a summary of all that the Church believes. It is an ancient formula that expresses the central truths of the faith. Every Sunday (and on other solemn feasts) the

Creed is prayed to remind those present of their baptismal declaration of faith and to unite the congregation as a community of believers preparing to approach the table of the Lord's Body and Blood. The Nicene Creed includes the phrase, "by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man," at which point the people bow (and on the feasts of Christmas and Annunciation they genuflect).

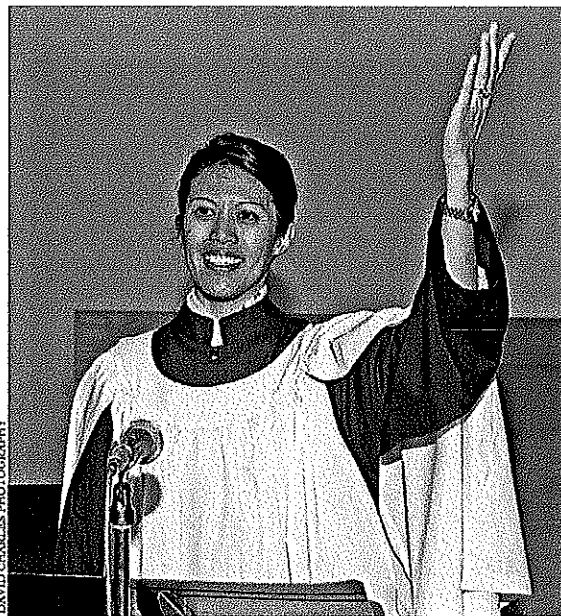
The Prayers of the Faithful: *"The Lord answers you in the day of trouble! ... May he remember all your offerings ... May he grant you your heart's desire ... and fulfill all your petitions"* (Ps 20:1-5). The Prayers of the Faithful or General Intercessions remind

the congregation that they are united with the whole Church in their concern for their own needs and the needs of others. Petitions are made at this time for the Pope and bishops, government leaders, the poor and the sick, and any other special needs present in the local community or the universal Church. There is often a time of silence so individuals can offer their own personal needs and unite them to the prayer of the whole Church.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

"This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19).

"Christ is present when his Word is proclaimed, and his Word is food for the soul."



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A cantor leading the responsorial Psalm at Mass

The Preparation of the Gifts: *"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps 51:17). "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1).* At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the altar is prepared and the gifts of bread and wine which will become Christ's Body and Blood are brought forward by the altar servers or representatives of the congregation. These gifts are received by the celebrant and are placed upon the altar. He blesses them, washes his hands (a sign of purification), and invites the people to pray that the sacrifice will be acceptable to God.

The Eucharistic Prayer: *"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come ... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:11-12).* The Mass is truly a sacrifice, a re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. Christ's death is made present in sacrament and thus the congregation is actually at Calvary, present at the foot of the cross. The Eucharistic Prayer contains many elements, but the most important is the consecration of the Eucharist, which uses Jesus' words of institution at the Last Supper. When the priest says these words, he acts in the person of Christ; at that moment, the bread and wine are changed into the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The Consecration is the most sacred act of the priesthood and from it springs the very source and life of the Church, the Eucharist.

The Lord's Prayer: *"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6:7-8).* After the Eucharistic Prayer, the people pray in the words that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is a petition for both natural and supernatural nourishment and again implores God for his mercy to grant forgiveness from sin so that

what is holy (the Eucharist) may be given to those who have been made holy through God the Father's love and mercy.

The Sign of Peace: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (Jn 14:27).* The priest invites the congregation to exchange a sign of peace (either a handshake or kiss).

The Lamb of God: *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Rv 5:12).* The *Agnus Dei* ("Lamb of God") reminds the people that the Body and Blood of Jesus which they are about to receive is truly the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Communion: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:53-54).* *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16).* To receive the Lord in the Eucharist is the greatest privilege of those in complete union with the Church. The Christian should approach the Eucharist humbly, and without any stain of serious sin; also the Church requires that a one-hour fast from food be observed by those going to Communion. After a sign of reverence (a bow), Holy Communion is received either in the hand or on the tongue. A time of meditation and thanksgiving follows this momentous gift.

The Concluding Rite

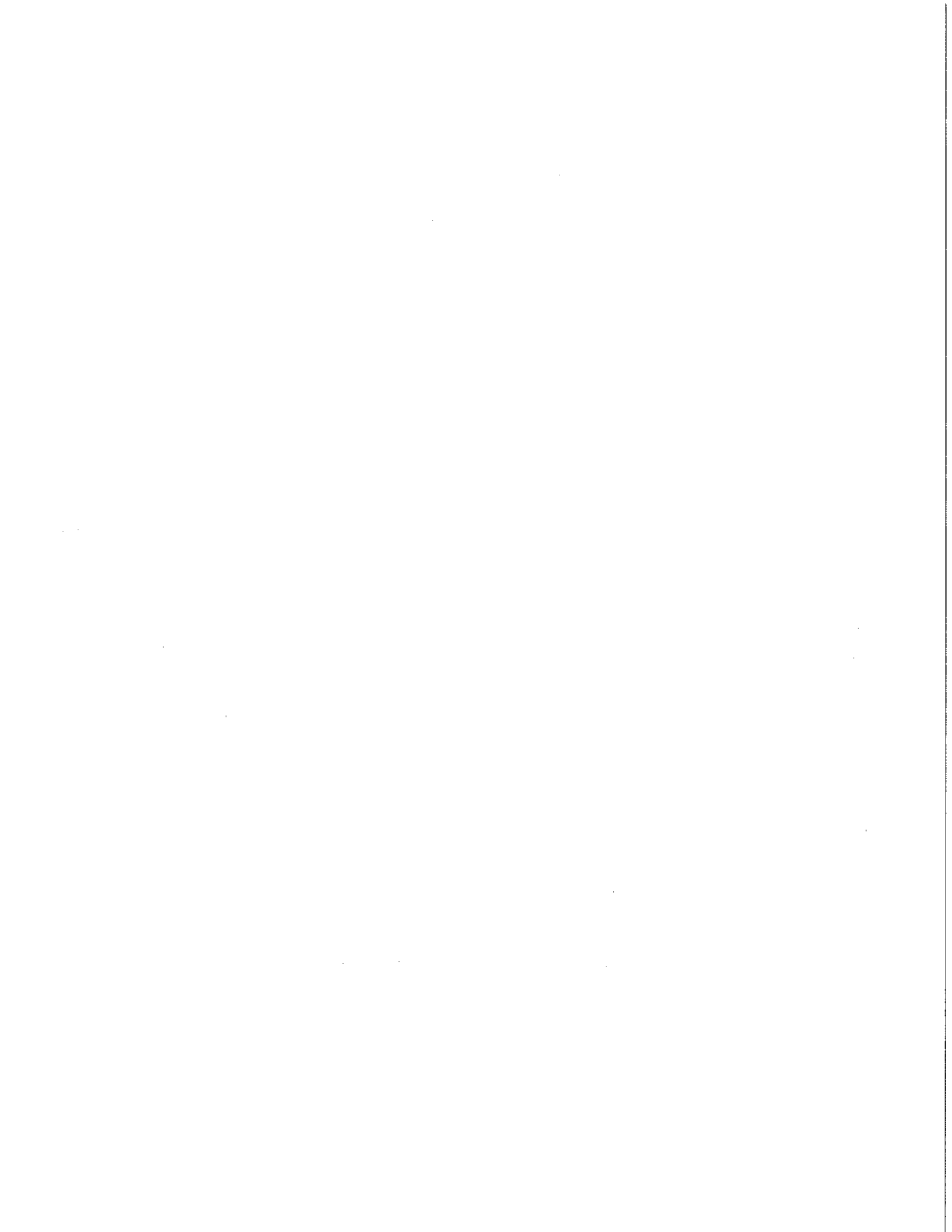
The concluding rite consists of the priest's greeting and final blessing, followed by the dismissal, which sends each of those present back to the world to do good works while praising and blessing the Lord: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" (*The Roman Missal, Concluding Rite*). The congregation responds: "Thanks be to God." The celebrant and those who had processed in with him then process out.

(CCC 1348-1355)

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The Sabbath and Sunday Worship

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; — it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." ~ Mark 16:1-7

THE LOVE of neighbor commanded by God in the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) is considered important by most people, but God's commandment to keep the sabbath holy (see Ex 20:8) frequently is not observed at all. And yet the sabbath is a foundational and fundamental element of God's creative activity: *"And on the seventh day God finished*

his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (Gn 2:2-3). We know that God, who is spirit and all-powerful, did not need to rest on the seventh day. Why, then, did he do it?

Why God Created the Sabbath

God created the sabbath for us, his human creatures. We are created with a need to worship him and, physically and spiritually, we need rest and lei-



Chapel of Sacred Heart Church in Bowie, Maryland, built in 1741

sure. As with everything else about God's creation, he is mindful of our needs and sees to it that they can be met. By "resting," God not only gave us a holy example to follow, but the time and opportunity to praise him and all that he has done as well.

In the Scriptural account of God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses, God elaborated on the commandment to keep the sabbath 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 maid-servant, 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 20:9-11). Not only does keeping the sabbath imitate God's action, but keeping the sabbath is not just for a few of us, but for everyone — the whole family, employees, strangers — and even for the animals that serve us.

"We are created with a need to worship him and, physically and spiritually, we need rest and leisure."

In the book of Deuteronomy, God's

commandment is elaborated even further. The sabbath not only recalls God's loving creation, but also commemorates God's liberation of his Chosen People, the Israelites, from their bondage in Egypt: "You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day" (Dt 5:15). The sabbath, therefore, is a day of freedom from the bondage of work.

The sabbath is also a sign of the irrevocable covenant God made with the People of Israel, reminding them forever of their status as his people: "You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you.... Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel" (Ex 31:13, 16-17). The sabbath, therefore, is central to the law of the Old Covenant, corresponding to the wisdom and will of God.

Jesus and the Observance of the Sabbath

The Gospels record several instances when Jesus was accused of violating the sabbath. These episodes tell us several things. First, Jesus tells us that the sabbath itself should not be seen as the master of human activities: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mk 2:27). Second, he teaches that we do not violate the sabbath by the work necessary for the worship of God (see Mt 12:5; see also Nm 28:9-10). Third, he teaches that works of mercy and serving our neighbor

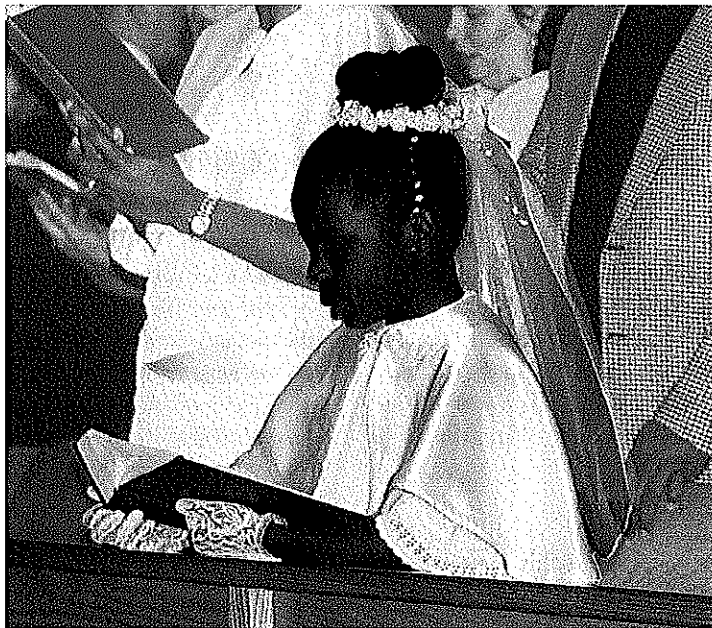
"Sunday worship and rest is both the memorial of God's creation and of Christ's Resurrection."

are also not violations of the sabbath (see Lk 13:14-16; Lk 14:1-5; Jn 7:22-23). He points out that even animals may be given necessary care on the sabbath (see Lk 13:15; Lk 14:5). Finally, he states unequivocally that "the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath" (Mk 2:28). Jesus has the right to interpret the divine command, declaring the sabbath as a day "for doing good rather than harm, for saving life rather than killing" (CCC 2173). This right he handed to St. Peter and his Church: "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven" (Mt 16:19, see also Mt 18:18). It is this power of binding and loosing that gives the Church the authority to establish Sunday rather than the sabbath as the day for Christian worship and rest.

The Origin of Sunday as the Lord's Day

On the first day of creation, God created the Heavens and the earth, separated light from darkness, and called the light day and the darkness night (see Gn 1:1-5). The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead also occurred on the first day of the week (see Jn 20:1-9). His Resurrection completed and validated his work of redemption, as St. Paul tells us:

"if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). This day, therefore, is a "new creation," more important than the day of creation itself: "The first creation finds its meaning and its summit in the new creation in Christ, the splendor of which surpasses that of the first creation"¹ (CCC 349). Sunday is often



A child singing during the Easter Vigil Mass in which she and her mother were baptized

¹ Cf. *Roman Missal*, Easter Vigil 24, prayer after the first reading

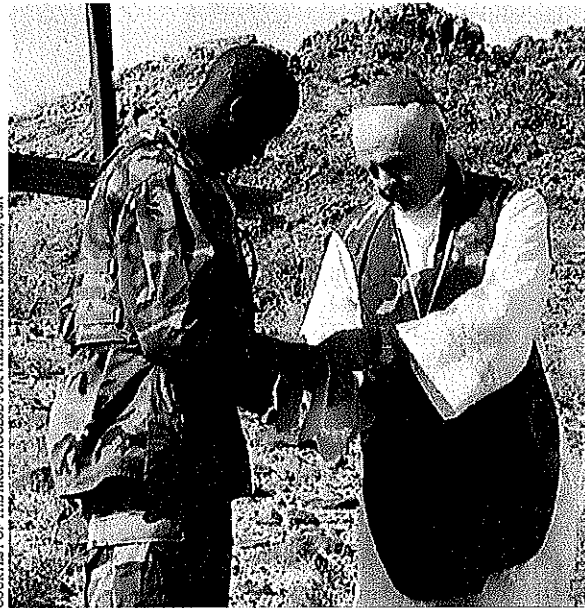
called in Christian writings the "eighth day" of creation, the day when the world was created anew.

For the Church, then, Sunday worship and rest is both the memorial of God's creation and of Christ's Resurrection. "In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish sabbath" (CCC 2175). For this reason, the Church has replaced the sabbath with Sunday worship and rest. Of all days, this is the day of which the Psalmist sings: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24). For Christians, Sunday came to be called "the Lord's Day."

Sanctifying the Lord's Day with Worship

The tradition of Sunday worship has been handed down from the apostles themselves. It is first documented in Scripture itself, when the Acts of the Apostles records a group of Christians having gathered together "to break bread" on the first day of the week (see Acts 20:7). This could be understood merely as having an ordinary meal, but from other early Christian writings we know that the phrase "to break bread" referred to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, that is, to what we today call the Mass.

Very early Christian writings give unequivocal witness to this tradition. The *Didache* (pronounced DEE-da-kay), or the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," is an extremely early work, almost certainly written before 100 AD, and possibly decades earlier. It speaks of gathering together, breaking bread, and giving thanksgiving — a very elemental description of the Mass — to be done every Lord's Day. In about 107 AD, St. Ignatius of Antioch specifically wrote of the deliberate replacement of the sabbath with Sunday: "Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death"² (CCC 2175). Around 155 AD, St. Justin Martyr wrote to the Roman emperor: "On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place"³ (CCC 1346), and then went on to describe Sunday worship, unmistakably the Mass. A few centuries later, St. Jerome wrote that the pagan name of



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Sunday Mass celebrated in the field by Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

the first day of the week, the "day of the sun," was acceptable, "for today the light of the world is raised, today is revealed the sun of justice with healing in his rays"⁴ (CCC 1166).

Because of Jesus' Resurrection, which began God's "new creation" in salvation history, the Lord's Day is the first of all feasts in the Church's life. Our

celebration of the Lord's Supper — the banquet table that the Lord has spread for us, the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass that is the center and heart of the Church's life —

is where the entire community of the faithful encounter our risen Lord.

Worshipping God at Mass on the Lord's Day is an obligation to be taken very seriously, as it fulfills God's commandment to give him regular, public worship. Every week, we celebrate both our Creator and our redemption from sin by Jesus Christ. Sunday worship is foundational for our life in Christ and cannot, therefore, be optional. The first precept of the Church spells out the Catholic's obligation to attend Mass on all Sundays (and holy days of obligation). (The Sun-

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² St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Magn. 9, 1 from Sources Chrétiennes 10, 88 (Paris: 1942)

³ St. Justin, Apol. 1, 65-67 from J.P. Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca 6, 428-429 (Paris, 1857-1866); from chap. 67

⁴ St. Jerome, Pasch. from Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 78, 550 (Turnhout, 1953)

day obligation is satisfied by attending a Saturday late afternoon or evening "vigil" Mass for the Sunday. This provision is based on the ancient Hebrew concept, found in the first verses of Genesis, that a day begins in the evening and concludes the following evening.)

Unless there is a serious reason — for example, illness, unavoidable travel to locations

where there is no Mass, dangerous weather conditions — or one is dispensed by the pastor, failure to attend Mass on Sunday is gravely sinful. For localities where no Sunday Mass is available without great hardship, one can seek at least to take part in a Liturgy of the Word, if celebrated, or engage in prayer personally, as a family, or as a group of families.

Keeping the Lord's Day thus fulfills the moral command of the Old Covenant, taking up its rhythm and spirit in the weekly celebration of God as our Creator and our Redeemer. By participating in the celebration of Mass, we show that we belong to a community of faith, and that we are faithful to Christ and his Church. As a community, we attest to God's holiness and to our hope of salvation, and strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Sanctifying the Lord's Day with Rest

God has designed us for lives that have a rhythm of work and rest. We sanctify the Lord's Day not only by participating in the Eucharistic celebration, but also by resting. In addition to the obligation to attend Mass, the first precept of the Church requires us to "abstain from those labors and business concerns which impede the worship to be rendered to God, the joy which is proper to the Lord's Day, or the proper relaxation of mind and body" (*Code of Canon Law*, Can. 1247).

Of course, work cannot entirely be removed from Sundays. Hospitals and nursing homes must be staffed, and children need care. However, we must be careful not to develop habits that make Sunday like any other day of



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the week. Only rarely does shopping need to be done on Sunday, and cooking elaborate meals to celebrate the day might be done partially in advance. The lawn can be mowed and the car washed another day. Children's sports need not take up Saturday *and* Sunday. Family life has been nearly choked out of existence by the multitude of commitments

that characterize today's society, and it takes commitment and vigilance to protect and strengthen the bonds of love in the most important of our communities, the family home. Sundays, furthermore, can offer precious time for silence, for personal reflection, and for meditation to strengthen our interior lives.

Making a greater effort to sanctify the Lord's Day includes avoiding activities that force others to work, and perhaps themselves forego worship. Both public and private employers have an obligation to ensure that employees have needed time for rest and worship. In places where Sundays are not legal holidays, especially where there is no other weekly legal holiday, Christians are especially obliged, by the witness of their prayer, respect for the Lord's Day, and joyful lives, to defend the importance of a weekly opportunity to rest and worship to the society as a whole.

Finally, Jesus' example shows that good works, such as care for the sick, infirm, poor, and elderly, are ways to sanctify the Lord's Day. Good works can also include ministries that serve the Church, such as catechesis of children and adults. When these are undertaken, they should not unduly take away from the claims of the family.

In a culture that seems to force us to live at an ever-faster pace, the Church's reinforcement of God's commandment to rest, relax, and enjoy the day are especially needed. We all need leisure to spend time with our families, to strengthen social ties, to expand our cultural horizons, and to deepen our spiritual lives. And God

tells us to have fun!

(CCC 345-349, 582, 1163, 1166-1167, 1343, 1345, 2042, 2168-2177, 2180-2188)

"We must be careful not to develop habits that make Sunday like any other day of the week."