



Pastor's Column

The Importance of the Sunday Obligation

November 19, 2017

In 2005, during the Year of the Eucharist that Pope St. John Paul the Great began before he died, his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, spoke on the importance of the Sunday Mass:

The Year of the Eucharist continues, called by our beloved Pope John Paul II, to reawaken ever more, in the consciences of believers, wonder toward this great Sacrament. In this singular Eucharistic time, one of the recurring topics is Sunday, the Day of the Lord.... Participation at Sunday Mass must be seen by a Catholic not as an imposition or a weight, but as a need and joy. To meet with [brothers and sister], to listen to the Word of God, and to be nourished of Christ, immolated for us, is an experience that gives meaning to life, which infuses peace in the heart. Without Sunday, we Catholics cannot live.

The importance of the Sunday Mass obligation for Catholic Christians is so crucial, in fact, that it is actually one of only five precepts of the Church; there are only a bare minimum of five things that Catholics need to do truly to be Catholic Christian not just in name only but in very truth, in heart and soul. The five precepts are: one, attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; two, going to confession at least once a year; three, receiving Holy Communion at least once during the Easter Season (note that we are called upon to attend Mass every Sunday, but that does not mean that we have to receive Holy Communion; and in fact, we should *not* receive Holy Communion when we attend Mass if we are aware of any mortal sin on our souls); four, observing the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church (especially Ash Wednesday and Good Friday); and five, providing for the needs of the Church according to one's ability.

And so, the Sunday Mass is extraordinarily important for the life of the Catholic Christian; the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and His Eucharist is the heart of the Church's life."

But why? First of all, because the Sunday Mass commemorates the Lord's Resurrection, the focal point of our entire Christian faith. St. Paul teaches us that if Christ had not risen from the dead, then our faith is pointless. The seventh day when God rested after Creation was the Jewish Sabbath – Saturday – and we know from the Gospel narratives that Christ rose from the dead on the morning after the Sabbath – Sunday. Sunday is the *new* Sabbath; Sunday is the Lord's Day, each Sunday being a sort of "mini-Easter." Skipping the Sunday Mass, therefore, is tantamount to not caring about the ultimate gift that the Lord gives to us: resurrection and eternal life.

Secondly, the Sunday Mass is the crucial centerpiece to a much-needed regularity and rhythm for our spiritual lives. Just like our bodies work in regular rhythm (we hunger, we eat, we get full; we tire, we sleep, we are refreshed), so our souls also work in regular rhythm. The devil and his demons never stop trying to tempt us into sin and lead us into hell; just so, Christ and His angels and saints never stop reaching out to us with grace and intercession to fight against temptation, ward off sin and evil, and thus cooperate with God's grace in our holy striving for Heaven.

Regular participation in the Sacraments – especially the Eucharist, and especially in the Sunday Mass – are our greatest weapons given us for fulfilling God's will for us here on Earth, and God certainly wills that all of us pass through this life into everlasting bliss in the life hereafter.

It is for our own good that we make every effort to attend the Sunday Mass; just like Pope Benedict XVI said, the Sunday Mass is "a need and a joy." May it be that all of us would renew our firm resolve to participate in the Mass on every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation.

~ Fr. Lewis