



THE GIFT OF SUNDAY

A theological reflection published with the ecclesiastical approval of Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI, for use in catechesis and prayerful reflection with the People of God in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Personal Study and Group Discussion Guide

“Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” – John 6:27

JANUARY 25, 2021
FEAST OF THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE

INTRODUCTION

to the Personal Study and Group Discussion Guide

This personal study and group discussion guide is offered as an expanded resource to accompany the theological reflection document “The Gift of Sunday.” Its format envisions two main uses although it is not limited to them. One use is for expanded personal reflection and study on the contents of “The Gift of Sunday.” The other use is for leading and sharing reflections about “The Gift of Sunday” in a small group discussion session format.

The study guide is laid out in a single format that allows for both possible uses, dividing “The Gift of Sunday” into five sections, or five study group sessions. Each session reprints the text of the specific section of “The Gift of Sunday” for easy access and reference, with endnotes of the original text maintained and placed at the end of the study guide.

Included in each study session are the following:

- Re-printed section texts of “The Gift of Sunday”
- A suggested prayer for personal reflection or group discussion
- Some additional points of emphasis, reflection, or commentary on the original text
- Discussion questions for personal or group reflection
- Suggestions for concrete daily applications of the points of “The Gift of Sunday”
- Suggestions for additional Scriptural passages for meditation based on the points in “The Gift of Sunday”

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SESSION ONE: *The Rest is in the Details*

PRAYER:

“God of might, giver of every good gift, put into our hearts the love of your name, so that, by deepening our sense of reverence, you may nurture in us what is good and, by your watchful care keep safe what you have nurtured. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.”

Collect, Twenty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

STUDY TEXT:

From “The Gift of Sunday,” sections 1 through 8:

1. Our world has been shaken in recent times by the deprivation of the bonds of communion. We have hungered for the times of joyful gatherings with each other. We have hungered for the ability to gather for worship, knowing what it means to be starved of the Sacraments. We have become sick with an anxious fear of death, growing at times forgetful of the promised rest of heaven. We have been led to question anew the relationship of humanity to the rest of the created world that provides goods we consume in order to live, but that also exposes us to deadly forces. Recently, our world has been undergoing a forced rest that has come upon us against our will, one that has arrested the normal routines of work and activity. This imposed rest has forced many of us to question the hectic pace of our work and world that had reached a fever pitch before our lives were brought to a stand-still. We need to reassess our priorities as children of God.
2. “I will give you rest,” the Lord says.¹ Ours is a world that seeks to understand anew, now more than ever, what is meant by authentic rest, authentic communion, and authentic worship. As we emerge from the deserts of deprivation, God invites us to become reacquainted, in the opportunity of a new beginning, with his original plan and desire for a world that needs true rest and true worship. We are invited to again come to know the meaning and the gift of Sunday.
3. Sunday is the one day of the week dedicated uniquely to the Lord and to worship. As such, it has its origins in the pattern of creation itself. This is made known not only by the study of the natural world, but also by the revelation of God in the Sacred Scriptures.
4. The natural world is filled with cycles and rhythms that govern every facet of life: the cycles of day and night, of seasons changing, of growth and decay, of birth and death. Many of the creatures of the animal world, especially humans, require a regular cycle of rest, or sleep, in order to live and flourish. Additionally, men and women uniquely require rest beyond the mere biological. We require a rest that re-centers, re-orient, and re-focuses the body, mind, and soul on our Creator himself, so that we can be renewed by the regular reminder of our unique human vocation to know, love, and serve God completely.
5. The Book of Genesis describes in inspired language the same reality that is made clear in the natural world. It speaks of God who made the earth after a pattern of days, thus allowing the passage of time itself, and the cycles of nature, to be a holy and sanctifying reality. The Scriptures show this most clearly by teaching that God rests on the seventh day of creation, revealing in sacred language the deepest purpose of the cycle of rest and renewal that extends across the fabric of the universe.

This cycle exists in nature to open up a needed space of contemplation of God himself, in all his wonder, and to point with a fanfare of praise and rejoicing to the one who made all things good.

6. Sunday, as a day of the Lord, originates at the dawn of time. It is inscribed in the created order. It is “inscribed by nature in the human heart to render God an outward, visible, public, and regular worship.”² Without Sunday, all of creation loses its proper interpretive key and meaning.

SUNDAY GROWS FROM A JOYFUL RELATIONSHIP

7. In the context of the fundamental relationship of creation to Creator, most especially of humanity’s relationship to God who made us uniquely in his image and likeness, we can speak of the word “obligation.” Obligation arises out of love that unites persons in relationship. Love takes the shape of obligation as it awakens the persons in relationship to what they know they must do for the one they love. Love makes demands on the lover, which the

lover freely, even joyfully undertakes because they know it is right and just. “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us.”³

8. God is the source of all life. He is the one to whom all creation, most especially the human person, points in its wondrous pattern. As we reflect upon our relationship to the God who made us, we come to realize the duty we have to render him regular, outward praise and worship. This duty to worship is linked to the pattern of rest that God placed into the created order. For the Christian, Sunday is the day of obligation and worship because it is the day of rediscovery of love, by us the creatures, for God our creator who has blessed us so abundantly. Sunday obligation flowers into Sunday rejoicing for the believer who rightly understands the love of God, and his magnificent generosity. Worship flows from wonder. For all of the same reasons, deliberately choosing not to worship or observe Sunday without good reason is a failure of love and of duty. Such a failure constitutes a serious break in our relationship to God and to each other.

For Added Reflection:

- The idea and practice of a weekly day of rest is not merely a religious idea. Yes, God has shown this to us in his revelations, but he has done so in a way that builds upon what we already see in the natural and biological world around us. Maintaining a regular day of rest is not only spiritually healthy, it is also our way of being naturally healthy.
- Christians understand that we are the most healthy and whole when we keep God at the center of our lives. This is why the purpose of a regular day of rest is not merely for entertainment, or simply to “sit around.” It is instead to allow us the opportunity to direct our thoughts and actions to acknowledging God’s goodness and love for us. The more we do this, the happier we are.
- “Obligation” sounds to our ears like a heavy, negative word; like a drudgery. Yet, when we love someone deeply, we know it is no burden to show them we love them by our actions. There are times in relationships when it may feel less fun to continue to show someone that we do love them and appreciate them. In those moments, our sense of duty or obligation helps us choose to show them love anyway

because we know it is the right thing to do. Keeping Sunday consistently set aside for God is no different. Sometimes “Sunday” will feel fun. Other times it may feel more like duty. In either case, because we love God who loves us, we know that we will always keep it sacred in the way that God commands us to.

For Discussion:

1. In what ways has the slower pace or limiting of events in a time of global pandemic been both a positive as well as a negative experience?
2. How do you feel when you have not rested enough physically? Why might God have made it necessary that so many creatures in the world, especially humans, require a regular pattern of physical rest? In what ways should we view the constant bodily reminders of the need for physical rest as God-given promptings of the need for us to regularly allow ourselves to spiritually rest in his hands?
3. We know what it means to physically rest by sleeping. What does it look like specifically to find “spiritual rest?”
4. “Without Sunday, all of creation loses its proper interpretive key and meaning,” (“The Gift of Sunday,” section 6). In what ways is a Christian believer who maintains a strong routine of Sunday rest and worship able to see more clearly the presence of God in the natural world around us?
5. How do we practice a sense of duty and obligation within our families or with our close friends? What happens to our families and friendships when we fail in our duties and obligations to them?
6. What is it about the word “obligation” when it applies to faith, worship, and God that sometimes sounds so harsh to our ears? If not “obligation,” what might be a better way to describe what we do owe to God and also what is at the same time the best thing for us?

For Living It Out:

- Count our blessings: at least once daily we should call to mind with gratitude what God has done for us and offer him prayers of “thanks.”
- Whenever we are struck by the beauty of some object we find in nature, we should say a quick prayer of praise to the God who made it. We should realize that the natural world has its own beautiful language of worshiping its creator when it exists as God created it to exist.
- If we find ourselves becoming sleepy, we should offer a short prayer to God that says: “Let me rest in you.”

For Meditation:

- 1 John 4:7-13
- Matthew 11:25-30

SESSION TWO: *Sunday is Natural and Intentional*

PRAYER:

“May your people exult forever, O God, in renewed youthfulness of spirit, so that, rejoicing now in the restored glory of our adoption, we may look forward in confident hope to the rejoicing of the day of resurrection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.”

Collect, Third Sunday of Easter

STUDY TEXT:

From “The Gift of Sunday,” sections 9 through 14:

FALLEN CREATION RECEIVES THE REMEDY OF SUNDAY

9. The Book of Genesis describes in the language of Eden the original pattern and harmony of creation oriented totally to God. It also describes how humanity’s first sin shattered this harmony. As humanity turned away from right adoration and awe of God, as humanity failed to worship God by instead choosing to worship itself, slavery entered the world. This slavery has assumed many forms since the earliest days of human history, most especially a slavery to tasks and work.
10. Tragically, humanity found itself sickened with the effects of self-worship. This sickness infected the rest of the created order as humans increasingly misused the goods of the earth, and also misused other human beings to pursue a false illusion of rest. Rather than resting in the contemplation of God, fallen humanity instead strove after a rest we thought we could achieve by working harder. We thought we could overcome the sufferings of life, in order to rest from labor, all on our own power.
11. In response to our turning away, God moved quickly to re-establish his covenant with us his people. God gave us the law as a way to rescue humanity from our empty pursuit of a fleeting rest from labor and pain. He gave us the law to orient us properly toward right love of him and of our neighbor. The lynchpin of this law of love of God and of neighbor, of the two tablets of the commandments, is the Third Commandment: to keep holy the Sabbath as a day of worship and of rest. To the extent that this commandment has been followed, the health of humanity and the health of creation has grown toward restoration. Conversely, in times and places where it has not been properly observed due to our chasing after temporary rest by enslavement to our tasks, humanity and the wider creation have descended into a cycle of destruction.
12. In this fallen world, the remedy for this discord is the Lord’s Day. In the time of Christian revelation, the Third Commandment has taken its definitive shape in Sunday as the day of the Lord, the day of worship, and the day of rest. Sunday is the heart of the renewal of the cosmos and of the entire fallen world. The Law of Sunday, the obligation in love of Sunday, is given to rescue us from ourselves by fully redirecting our attention towards God.
13. Since the earliest days of Christianity, believers understood Sunday as a “little Easter.” Saint Augustine calls Sunday “a sacrament of Easter,” and Saint Jerome proclaims “Sunday is the day of the resurrection, it is the day of Christians, it is our day.”⁴ It is “our day” because it reminds us of the essence of who we are, a people claimed by God through the blood of Christ who rose glorious from the grave. Death and sin shall be no more for Christ has conquered over them.

THE HEART OF SUNDAY IS WORSHIP

14. For Sunday to authentically be a remedy for the Fall of Eden, Sunday requires the act of worship. A day that exists solely for its own sake for the restful contemplation and adoration of God needs to originate in an activity that is also carried out solely for its own sake. Worship is the act of turning one's heart, mind, body, and soul to face God directly. We focus on him intentionally, acknowledging the truth that he is our God, for whom we long, for whom our soul thirsts.⁵ We recognize with our whole selves, that He made us, and we belong to him.⁶ He alone, for his unbounded love, is worthy

of our highest praise and adoration. Worship is an intentionally unproductive action by any measurements of our earthly existence. It is not supposed to “produce,” or “accomplish” anything in the realm of the merely material. In this way, our participation in an intentionally other-worldly activity, each week, rescues us from the slavery of production. Resting only in God, in the act of worship, immerses us in the true rest of heaven for which we long. This heavenly rest of the act of worship, the true remedy for the Fall of Eden, cannot be attained through any other earthly labors, good though they may be. A Sunday without worship cannot truly be a day of rest.

For Added Reflection:

- We live in a time of increasing awareness of our need to be careful stewards of the goods of creation. We are no stranger to laws and mechanisms that facilitate the conservation of precious resources, and our daily routines are modified more and more each day to bring about a smaller “ecological footprint.” A widespread cultural observance of Sunday as a true day of rest is a needed spiritual remedy to our habits of over-consumption. Our desire to consume the goods of creation is a wound from the Fall of Eden and it requires a healing remedy that is spiritual.
- Sunday as a “little Easter” offers joy to believers in a way that fills up what is empty in our hearts. It fills us up in a way that all the material goods we can consume or buy will never be able to. Sunday satisfies our constantly hungry human appetites.
- Just because we can build, manufacture, create, or do something does not mean that we should do so. The human capacity to bend the created world around our own ideas and purposes knows no limits, especially as we build very impressive devices to maximize our capacity for work. Yet, we do not seem to be any happier, calmer, or less busy for all our “advancements.” Sunday is a much-needed boundary or limit on our insatiable appetite for maximizing our potential through things that we create. Sunday makes needed room for the deeper sources of happiness that come from God alone.
- The day of Sunday itself has to be firmly tied to routines that keep it from getting swept away by the tide of a continual pace of new activities. This is why God commands us to worship at Mass. The strong obligation to attend Mass forces us to bend our day around God rather than trying to bend God around our day.

For Discussion:

1. What are some of the ways that humanity has attempted to solve our problems through greater technological advances in such a way that we ended up creating more problems? As Christians, what is our answer to the fact that this world will never be a perfect one?
2. What is it about choosing not to be busy that we sometimes find so difficult?
3. Does God view “productivity” in the same way that we often do? What can we produce that is the greatest value in God’s eyes?
4. Describe the social and economic pressures that lead to the decisions to work or always be busy, even on Sundays. What would happen to us all if there was a wide-spread and collective decision to avoid unnecessary work on Sundays?
5. In what way is Sunday a different experience with Mass as opposed to without Mass?

For Living It Out:

- Become aware of the Mass schedules in your area to make maximum use of the opportunities to attend Mass on a Sunday evening, or a Saturday evening, or an early Sunday morning in order to accommodate long work shifts.
- If your job forces you to work on Sundays, find little ways during the workday to offer quiet prayers to God of “thanksgiving.” Find a few minutes to stop and pray before the Blessed Sacrament in an open church at some point during the week to renew your connection to the Eucharist.

For Meditation:

- Genesis 11:1-9
- Luke 24: 13-35

SESSION THREE: *The Sunday Offering*

PRAYER:

“O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left us a memorial of your Passion, grant us, we pray, so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood that we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. AMEN.”

Collect, Solemnity of Corpus Christi

STUDY TEXT:

From “The Gift of Sunday,” sections 15 through 22:

THE HEART OF WORSHIP IS THE MASS AND THE HOLY EUCHARIST

15. For Catholics, the authentic worship of Sunday takes the necessary form of participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass. “The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice.”⁷ Certainly it is true that other types of personal and devotional prayer that are offered in any setting besides the Mass are of great value to growth in holiness and to giving God praise. However, the unbroken pattern of the Christian Church from its first days is one of weekly and obligatory public prayer that follows the pattern that originates in Christ and the Apostles.
16. The essential pattern of weekly Christian prayer and worship includes by necessity these components: gathering in person together on Sunday, hearing the Scriptures publicly proclaimed in the same gathering, and offering in this same gathering prayers of blessing over the gifts of bread and wine in imitation of Christ at the Last Supper so that these gifts become his Body and Blood. These are the essential elements of Sunday Mass that are both ancient and also the necessary form of worship that God intends for us his people for our authentic rest and adoration. They bring us into essential contact with God and with each other in a way that cannot be replicated outside of the Mass, even in the most excellent other forms of private, devotional prayer.

Tradition preserves the memory of an ever-timely exhortation: Come to Church early, approach the Lord, and confess your sins, repent in prayer.... Be present at the sacred and divine liturgy, conclude its prayer and do not leave before the dismissal.... We have often said: “This day is given to you for prayer and rest. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”⁸

17. The early Christians under persecution were commanded to forsake their Sunday worship by burning incense to pagan gods instead. The Christians refused to do so, and they were martyred acknowledging Sunday as the day of the Resurrection of Christ. They went to their death exclaiming to their executioners that they could not live without celebrating the Lord’s day.⁹

THE HOLY EUCHARIST IS THE BODY AND BLOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

18. “At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s Body and Blood.”¹⁰ The Church has come to know with absolute certainty that the Lord Jesus, who is true God and true man, is truly present in the Eucharist. We refer to this as the “Real Presence.”

“This presence is called ‘real’ - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as

if they could not be called ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”¹¹

19. Furthermore, when the Eucharist is received as spiritual food by believers who are properly disposed to receive it, Christ truly nourishes our bodies and souls with his very own Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. This is a sharing of God’s own essential presence with us, the members of his Mystical Body, in a way that cannot be replicated apart from the Eucharist. God desires to sustain us with himself. For this reason it can be said the Eucharist, as the true Body and Blood of Christ, is the source and summit of authentic rest from our earthly toil, as the food that we cannot earn but must instead freely and lovingly receive.

THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION RESTORES THE COSMOS

20. In the presentation of the gifts during Mass we give thanks to God for bread and wine, the “work of human hands,” which are more fundamentally “fruit of the earth,” and “of the vine”- gifts of the Creator.¹² God’s full remedy for the shattering of the original communion between God, man, and creation has come to us in the Eucharist itself, which is at the heart of Sunday. Our weekly participation in the Eucharistic celebration on the Lord’s Day brings us into regular contact with a new pattern of communion that God desires to establish across the whole created order. This pattern consists of the combining of the fruits of creation, properly cared for and recognized as divine gifts, with the dignity of human labor, to produce the essential goods of earthly

life. God in turn blesses these goods and elevates them, by infusing them with his very self, to bring about the mystical rejoining of heaven, earth, all of creation, and all of humanity in the communion of salvation:

In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value.¹³

21. This pattern of communion allows us to say with awe and conviction that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life.”¹⁴ Its celebration and worship extends the saving bond of communion with Christ across all of space, and all of time. This lovingly joins into one Mystical Body the living, the dead, those in heaven, and those on earth.
22. This pattern of renewal that recurs in the Eucharistic sacrifice finds its essential home in the heart of Sunday itself. Sunday is the day intentionally dedicated to the restoration of the harmony of earth, heaven, labor, worship of God, and the authentic communion of the human family. Sunday without the Eucharist lacks the necessary means that God utilizes to renew the created order on his own terms. Left to our own devices and means, we ourselves cannot accomplish this restful renewal of creation, or of the human family, that in our hearts we so earnestly desire. This is why God deliberately gives us the gift and obligation of Sunday, of worship, and of the Eucharist all as one integrated practice.

For Added Reflection:

- The created universe is physical. Humans are both physical as well as spiritual. God created our spiritual nature to be intimately connected with our physical nature in such a manner that if we are truly going to be renewed spiritually, something physical must also be a part of the renewal process. This is why the Lord gives us Sacraments which are a necessary mixing of the spiritual and the physical. We cannot live spiritually without sacraments in the way that God desires for us to live any more than we can survive on virtual food or virtual water. Sacraments give life in a way nothing else does.
- One reason why it is the celebration of Mass that is obligatory on Sundays as opposed to some other type of prayer experience has to do with the action that is at the center of the Mass that cannot be replicated outside of it. The central action is a working of God and a working of his people in an active offering of prayers that results in a physical and spiritual transformation. During Mass, what begins as ordinary bread and wine is changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, elevating earthly things to new heights. Similarly, each person who engages the action of the Mass is also transformed, being lifted to new heights. This is a spiritual change that is interwoven by necessity with a physical change of substance (“transubstantiation”).
- Not only are persons renewed and changed by sacraments, but the created world around us is renewed and changed as well. The Fall of Eden caused a condition of tension to exist between humanity, creation, and God. In the sacraments, earthly things like bread, water, wine, and olive oil are mixed with the life of heaven in a way that heals this tension and renews creation.
- Earthly, everyday lives of labor, sweat, tears, joys, dreams, and hopes are also mixed with the life of heaven as we encounter the action of the Mass with a heartfelt desire to offer our experiences to God on the altar. Through the Mass, God seeks to make us more and more into heavenly creatures.
- The intentional engagement of Sunday as a day of rest and worship transforms society in the same way that the encounter with the action of the Mass and the receiving of the Body and Blood of the Lord transforms individual believers.

For Discussion:

1. How do you respond to someone who says that they do not “get anything out of Mass?”
2. In what ways are you fed at Mass by the Scriptures that are proclaimed and the homily that is preached?
3. Think of examples in life when you came to Mass with a joy or a worry to offer to God on the altar. In what ways was it helpful for you to bring these to God? How do you think God receives these offerings of our joys and pains?
4. How do you respond to someone who says that they believe the Eucharist is “merely a symbol” of the Lord Jesus?
5. What are the similarities and the differences between a Sunday meal together as a family at home and the gathering of the community at Sunday Mass?
6. If a celebration of the Mass did not include any singing or active vocal responses on the part of those gathered, Catholics believe that the Lord Jesus is still truly present on the altar in the Eucharist. In what ways might it be true that our use of music or responses at Mass helps us be fully present to the Lord? What is the role of silence during the Mass to help us be fully present to the Lord?
7. Talk about a time when you left Mass feeling renewed. Talk about a time when it was a sacrifice or difficult to pray well during a Mass. Talk about a time when it took a real effort just to get to Mass.

For Living It Out:

- Make use of printed or electronic resources that provide access to the Scriptures for Mass and pray with the readings ahead of time.
- Come to each Mass with at least one intention in mind that you would like to focus your prayer on during the Mass.
- Try to come away from each Mass with one, simple point that can be shared with others from the Scripture readings or from the homily.
- Consider making regular visits to open church buildings to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle or make time for regular adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament as a way to deepen your personal connection to the Most Holy Eucharist.

For Meditation:

- John 6:1-71
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

SESSION FOUR: *Dying to Rise*

PRAYER:

“God of everlasting mercy, who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast kindle the faith of the people you have made your own, increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed, that all may grasp and rightly understand in what font they have been washed, by whose Spirit they have been reborn, by whose Blood they have been redeemed. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. AMEN.”

Collect, Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

STUDY TEXT:

From “The Gift of Sunday,” sections 23 through 26:

THE SACRIFICES OF FRIDAY LEAD TO THE JOYS OF SUNDAY

23. Sunday is always the day of the Resurrection and the new creation, all throughout the year. However, Sunday is not the only day of the week that holds special value to the Christian. We also recognize that the glory of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday was preceded by the loving sacrifice of the Cross on Good Friday. The Real Presence of Christ in the Mass, on the altar, is the manifestation of the whole Paschal Mystery that incorporates both Good Friday and Easter Sunday. For this reason, since our earliest days, Christians have marked Fridays throughout the entire year (not only during Lent) as days especially devoted to penance and to contemplation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
24. The regular observance of Fridays that are days of penance helps to foster in the hearts of believers a true adoration of the Cross of Jesus Christ, a desire to be forgiven of sins, and a deep gratitude for God’s mercy. These essential dispositions of the heart that are so naturally linked to Fridays are ones that a Christian must regularly cultivate if one is to be truly well-disposed and prepared to regularly participate fully in the Eucharistic celebration of Sundays.

RECONCILIATION AS THE PATH TO COMMUNION

25. We cannot partake of the authentic rest of the Lord’s Day, or of the consumption of the food of the Eucharist, or of the fullness of the rest of heaven itself, if we are knowingly and freely persisting in serious sins. Sin infects what should otherwise be a healthy and holy communion that exists with God and also with our neighbor. A believer is divided by his or her desires if he or she persists in actions that damage communion, and foster unrest, while at the same time attempting to participate in act of Eucharistic communion and worship that exists to generate rest. This is why from the earliest days of the Christian community the regular confession of sins was mentioned as a required action, along with the regular participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice.¹⁵
26. The Sacrament of Reconciliation as a necessary means of preparation for the authentic celebration of the Lord’s Day is therefore an essential element of the renewal and remedy that Sunday is intended to provide. The full joy of the celebration of Sunday, and its authentic rest, requires the regular embrace of the penance and sacrifice of Friday. In this way, the pattern and cycle of the Christian week as a regular participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, by honoring both Friday and Sunday, comes to its perfection.¹⁶

For Added Reflection:

- God uses any means that he possibly can to assist us in our walk of holiness. One means he uses is the passage of time itself and the natural cycles of schedules. In the Church’s long tradition of prayer, we have typically thought about each waking hour from sleep as a mini resurrection. In a similar way we have thought about each falling to sleep as a mini death. Each day we die, and we rise. A week is a larger version of the same pattern. Every Friday for the Christian is an opportunity to meditate upon the death of Christ, and every Sunday the opportunity to meditate upon his resurrection. On Fridays we do penance and on Sundays we feast. Each week we die, and we rise. Thinking of the natural cycles of our schedules in this way allows the passage of time itself to be something that connects us to Christ, helping us to grow in holiness.
- No one approaches the Eucharist on Sunday as a perfect person, even if one has recently celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is not as though one must be flawless to receive the Eucharist. What is asked of us, however, is that each of us be striving as best we can to live the commandments of loving God and neighbor. To be “in communion,” means that we are attempting as much as possible to accept the fullness of Catholic teachings, and that we are attempting as much as possible to live the fullness of the Gospel. Communion with Christ takes the necessary shape of also being in communion with the Catholic Church. To receive the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, requires us to be “in communion.” Receiving sacramental Holy Communion is both a public, outward expression of our striving after being in communion with Christ and the Catholic Church as well as necessary nourishment to strengthen our communion with Christ and with the Catholic Church.
- If we sense that we have fallen short of these necessary marks of authentic Communion in a way that is intentional, willful, mortal, or serious, then it is not appropriate to receive Communion until one has first celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For sins against authentic communion with God and neighbor that are smaller in nature, or venial, God offers us a variety of remedies to heal these sins, including some parts of the Mass itself such as the Penitential Rite. Engaging these remedies with sincerity prepares us to receive the Eucharist.
- Each of us has the opportunity during the Mass to acknowledge and express the reality that no one is worthy to approach the altar without God’s merciful grace allowing us to do so. This is part of why we pray just prior to receiving the Eucharist: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

For Discussion:

1. What are some simple and concrete ways to make Fridays throughout the year a day of sacrifice?
2. What are the challenges that come with making small sacrifices on Fridays all throughout the year in a society where Friday is also the day to celebrate the end of the work week?
3. Think of some of the ways that unresolved arguments or conflicts in a household have a way of making it difficult to share meals together as a family. How should families work to resolve these conflicts?
4. Think of some of the ways that unresolved arguments in a parish community can make it difficult to gather together for Mass. What are the ways that we are asked to resolve these conflicts in our parish families so that we can gather for Mass with authentic joy?
5. Based on the definition above of what it means to seek to be “in communion” with Christ and the Church, why is it the case that we have to be careful as a Church about who can receive the Eucharist? What would be diminished about our respect and understanding for the Eucharist if we simply gave it to anyone without first asking if it is appropriate for them to receive it?
6. It is sometimes necessary that a person attending Mass not come forward to receive Holy Communion, perhaps because they are not Catholic, or perhaps they are aware of the need to celebrate Reconciliation before doing so. What are some ways that a praying community can respectfully be welcoming to people in this situation while still honoring their correct understanding of the need to abstain from receiving Holy Communion?

For Living It Out:

- There are many things one can “give up” on Fridays as a form of simple sacrifice. Whatever is given up should be simple comforts that you enjoy.
- Consider giving up something on Fridays as a whole household, or as a group.
- We can celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation any time of the year, but the Church finds the seasons of Advent and Lent to be especially appropriate times to do so in preparation for the great feasts of Christmas and Easter.
- Pray often for non-Catholic Christians who, even though they are baptized, are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church and therefore cannot receive the Eucharist. Pray for the unity of all Christians.
- Pray for the members of the Catholic Church whose life circumstances currently do not allow them to appropriately receive the Eucharist. Pray for the grace of a more deeply converted heart for all the baptized.

For Meditation:

- Philippians 2: 6-11
- Luke 15:11-32

SESSION FIVE: *The Day of Justice*

PRAYER:

“Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.”

Collect, First Sunday of Advent

STUDY TEXT:

From “The Gift of Sunday,” sections 27 through 31:

THE JOY OF SUNDAY LEADS TO JOYFUL WITNESS

27. Christians become witnesses of faith and agents of Divine renewal for the world only to the extent that we observe Sunday so that it is clearly different than the other days of the week. On Sunday individual believers joyfully take the Mass as the pattern of an entire day spent intentionally contemplating the blessings of God. On Sunday the Christian gives thanks to God in the fullest sense, and marvels at his generosity, by joining prayers of gratitude to the offering of the Eucharist which itself means “thanksgiving.” This gratitude is nourished by the Scriptures that a believer intentionally reads or hears on Sunday. This same gratitude includes thanksgiving for the gifts of creation, and a desire to praise the God who made the earth good. Gratitude gives rise to joy, and joy spreads the Gospel.¹⁷
28. A believer lives the good news of Sunday by deliberately limiting activities or routines that resemble too closely the pattern of the rest of the week, even if those weekday activities are good. Sunday involves activities that renew heart, soul, and mind in a way that the tasks of the rest of the week, even if good, do not ordinarily allow. “The institution of the Lord’s Day helps everyone to enjoy

adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious lives.”¹⁸

SUNDAY WITNESS IS THE GUARDIAN OF JUSTICE AND MISSION

29. The ongoing redemption of society and all of creation, in the authentic pattern of Divine rest that is the foretaste of eternal salvation, requires that the good news of Sunday be lived out on a scale that is far reaching:

Sanctifying Sundays and holy days requires a common effort. Every Christian should avoid making unnecessary demands on others that would hinder them from observing the Lord’s Day. Traditional activities (sports, restaurants, etc.), and social necessities (public services, etc.), require some people to work on Sundays, but everyone should still take care to set aside sufficient time for leisure. With temperance and charity the faithful will see to it that they avoid the excesses and violence sometimes associated with popular leisure activities. In spite of economic constraints, public authorities should ensure citizens a time intended for rest and divine worship. Employers have a similar obligation toward their employees.¹⁹
30. Our actions and routine on Sunday are different. In this way, Sunday is an essential guardian of justice and

human dignity ensuring that persons are more important than productivity. Justice and the proper sharing of goods are only possible in a culture that firmly places its trust and hope in God's providence and generosity. Such a disposition can only arise in a society that regularly pauses from earthly labor to acknowledge the truth that without God, all of our merely human efforts at eliminating social ills only lead to more misery. A society regularly nourished by the Bread of Life, and by authentic Sunday leisure, is one in which the works of

charity and mercy flourish to become a harvest of justice that God himself raises up on his earth. Being renewed on Sunday energizes us for the work of salvation.

31. In a world where as many people as possible come to recognize and observe the good news of Sunday, there emerges the valuable gift of authentic rest, of proper care for humanity, of proper care for creation, and of the necessary cultural orientation to God who is Lord of all.

For Added Reflection:

- It is not easy to make a dent in deeply ingrained and widespread cultural habits by making what seem like small, personal choices that go against those habits. So many people in our present day do not pause to consider if some activity they are engaged in on a Sunday is best left for a different day of the week. So many businesses are open on Sundays in the same manner that they are for the other weekdays. We must not give up on the idea that our personal choices to go against these trends do matter a great deal in God's eyes.
- The Christian tradition of Sunday, as distinct from some of the Sabbath customs of Jesus' day, does not demand that absolutely no labor or activities be done. Sunday is a day for activities that bring enjoyment, rejuvenation, and inspiration. Yet, even these types of activities can become a hindrance to true Sunday rest if they are not done with a sense of moderation, if they frequently divide families, or if they take priority over Mass.
- We have long recognized that there are some activities that simply cannot come to a halt on Sundays for the basic preservation of life and society. People in the medical and emergency professions are always "on-call" in the service of public safety, for example. At the same time, it cannot be necessary that all our industries and businesses be open on Sundays for society to be truly healthy, holy, humane, and Christian. There must be a middle ground of Sunday activity for us in our modern world that Christians are called to help bring about.
- In a world where no one pauses for Sunday, different social classes emerge in a way that presents challenges for how we understand the preservation of human dignity. There emerge those who can afford not to work on Sundays, and also those who must work on Sundays, doing so not only to earn a living, but also to sustain the leisure habits of those who are consuming on Sundays for recreation. If Sunday is viewed merely as a day for recreational consumption on the part of one group of people, unfortunately it

robs the opportunity for worship, leisure, and rest of another group who must be at work to support these activities. Each of us must pray carefully about the resources we are consuming, both human resources and natural resources, to sustain our leisure activities.

- A society that engages Sunday with seriousness as a whole, is forced to confront important questions of priorities, schedules, and routines so that society can be truly humane and just.

For Discussion:

1. What is the difference between leisure and entertainment? What is the difference between worship and entertainment?
2. What would a society look like wherein everyone observed Sunday rest and worship in a meaningful manner?
3. What must change in your own personal life in order to observe Sunday in the best way possible?
4. What if the circumstances of your job and life make it very difficult not to work on a Sunday? What are some ways you can try to live out the Sunday call to rest and worship even if it will not be the ideal?
5. Describe the ways in which an intentional observance of each Sunday as day of rest and worship, even if challenging at first, might ultimately make you a more joyful person.
6. What is the role of civil government in fostering an authentic culture of Sunday rest and worship? (see “The Gift of Sunday” section 29).
7. What are examples of activities that can be done on a Sunday that do not interfere with the obligation to worship and that also do not place unnecessary demands on others around us to engage in labor to support our leisure? Is there a way for society to bring a balance to these important ends (for example, if hardware stores must be open on a Sunday so that people can enjoy gardening projects, should they be open for only a few hours?).

For Living It Out:

- To make Sunday a special day for God and for worship, begin planning for it earlier in the week. Anticipate what types of shopping or activities could possibly be done earlier so that Sunday itself is not so full, making room for worship and for family time.
- Consider making a regular custom of Sunday family dinners together at home.
- Offer extra prayers for people in our world who cannot always take Sunday off because they have professions that are at the service of public safety and well-being: medical doctors, first-responders, law enforcement officials, etc.

For Meditation:

- Luke 10:38-42
- Luke 17:11-19

ENDNOTES

- 1 Matthew 11:28.
- 2 Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 2176.
- 3 1 John 4:10.
- 4 Cf Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, sections 2 and 19.
- 5 Psalm 63:2.
- 6 Psalm 100:3.
- 7 Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 2181.
- 8 Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 2178.
- 9 Cf John F. Dedek, *Titius and Bertha Ride Again: Contemporary Moral Cases* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1974), 75.
- 10 Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 1333.
- 11 Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, sec 39.
- 12 Cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 1333.
- 13 Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 1368.
- 14 *Lumen Gentium*, 11.
- 15 *Didache*, sections 4 and 14.
- 16 *Didache*, sections 4 and 14.
- 17 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, sections 1 through 13.
- 18 Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 2184.
- 19 Catechism of the Catholic Church, sec 2187.

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