



## The Day of the Lord **Dies Domini**

The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, begins his reflection on the significance of Sunday by focusing on the theme of creation. We are all very familiar with the accounts in *Genesis* of the creation of the world. Though these are not to be interpreted literally and scientifically, they reveal an intimate truth about our God. He creates the entire universe, as a home for His final and favorite creation, humanity. Then on the seventh day, God

'rested' from His work. Obviously God does not need to rest, as an all-powerful being could never tire from doing work. However, this symbol "...speaks, as it were, of God's lingering before the 'very good' work (Gn 1:31) which his hand has wrought, in order to cast upon it a gaze full of joyous delight" (Dies Domini #11). Therefore, it could be said that God has sanctified two things in these actions: first, labour and the need to work; second, resting after work has been completed. By God creating humans after He had created everything else, He could have simply said to us, "enjoy, do whatever you want with it"; instead, He told the first humans to, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it..." (Gn. 1: 28). Thus, we have a responsibility to become "God's co-workers" (#10). At the same time, God saw it necessary to rest upon the completion of work. We, too, must follow that example. This is where the Jewish custom of resting on the Sabbath comes from. The last day of the week for Jews is Saturday, yet we as Christians mark Sunday as our day of rest. Sunday has taken on a new significance for us who remember Christ's resurrection, "...therefore, Sunday is the day of rest because it is the day 'blessed' by God and 'made holy' by him, set apart from the other days to be, among all of them, 'the Lord's Day'" (#14).



## The Day of Christ Dies Christi

We last considered how God, who rested after work, invites us to rest as well; hence the reason for the Sabbath. Now we as Christians have moved the traditional Sabbath from the last day of the week, to the first day after the Sabbath- Sunday. "This is what the Christian Sunday does, leading the faithful each week to ponder and live the event of Easter, true source of the world's salvation" (Dies Domini #19). The miracle of God becoming human in Jesus Christ reaches its culmination in the Resurrection, which we commemorate in a special way at Easter. However, this event is so significant for humanity, in particular, the Christian, that we gather EVERY Sunday

in order to celebrate this gift and mystery. "In effect, Sunday is the day above all other days which summons Christians to remember the salvation which was given to them in baptism and which has made them new in Christ" (#25). At our baptism, we were incorporated into the very life of Christ which unites us also to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and we have been promised that if we continue to live in Him while on earth, we will be raised after our death to live forever with Him in Heaven. This reality is so profound, and so utterly important, that we have felt the need to dedicate one day of each week to gathering as a community who shares this common belief in order to express our gratitude, and to come to more fully understand what Christ has accomplished for us. "It is clear then why, even in our own difficult times, the identity of this day must be protected and above all must be lived in all its depth" (#30). This is the reason we rest on Sunday, in order to be rejuvenated after our work, before we return to it again, and, more importantly, to have a day dedicated in thanksgiving to our Lord.

## The Day of the Church **Dies Ecclesiae**



We know that as Christians, we rest on Sunday as a reward for our weekly work and in order to devote time to reflecting in gratitude upon the gift of Christ's life, death and resurrection. In order that this reflection takes place most fruitfully, from the first days after Jesus rose, His

followers gathered together- this is the Church. "Those who have received the grace of baptism are not saved as individuals alone, but as members of the Mystical Body, having become part of the People of God" (Dies Domini #31). Therefore, the fullest way to express our belief in what it means to be baptized into a community is for that community to gather in worship of our God. It is significant that after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples, He returned among them "a week later" (see Jn. 20:26). This "...can be seen as a radical prefiguring of the Christian community's practice of coming together every seven days on 'the Lord's Day' or Sunday, in order to profess faith in his Resurrection and to receive the blessing which he had promised..." (#33). We keep with this by meeting every Sunday, as a Church, to be nourished by God's word in the Scriptures, and by His own flesh and blood in the Eucharist, in preparation for "...that Sunday which knows no end" (#37), when in Heaven we will all be together, as one, looking at our God face to face. There is a responsibility on the part of all those who belong to this sacred family to make every effort to participate actively in it. We all know the partial feeling of emptiness at the absence of a family member at a family gathering. By being present in this assembly, we are given strength and courage from each other's witness to return to our places of work or study and continue to spread the good news of the gospel. It is true that Catholics have an obligation to attend Sunday Mass, but we try not to see attending Mass as an imposed burden, so much as a wonderful opportunity to be in communion with one another, and especially in gratitude for everything that God has done for us. Our gift back to God is a joyful and grateful heart; we reveal this to Him by our willingness and excitement to gather with our brothers and sisters in faith. This is most evident in the way we greet each other, in the exchange of a sign of peace, in the financial contributions we are able to make, and especially in our song, "...since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart..." (#50). Sunday provides a gifted way for the People of God to mark their week- your week!



## The Day of Humanity **Dies Hominis**

We know that God's rest on the final day of creation invites us to share in that rest. As a Church, we gather on Sunday to turn even our rest into praise and thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Therefore, Sunday, in a unique way, marks the week-to-week life of the Christian. In addition to the gift of the resurrection, all of humanity, especially Christians, are called to see Sunday itself as a gift in virtue of our basic human dignity. It is "...a day given by God to men and women for their full

human and spiritual growth" (Dies Domini

#58). We have seen how Sunday nourishes us spiritually, but having a day ordained for relaxation, gratitude and community serves as a reminder that people are not mere means to an end (for example, getting work done) but that we are valuable in and of ourselves. "...The rest decreed in order to honour the day dedicated to God is not at all a burden imposed upon man, but rather an aid to help him to recognize his life-giving and liberating dependence upon the Creator... In honouring God's 'rest', man fully discovers himself..." (#61). As people who must work hard in order to survive, there is a strong temptation to believe that we must strictly rely upon ourselves in order to be looked after. However, in faith, we know that it is ultimately God who provides for all of our needs. Therefore, by setting aside one day of the week to acknowledge Him, we deny modern society which demands us to work constantly and produce abundantly. "Sunday rest then becomes 'prophetic', affirming not only the absolute primacy of God, but also the primacy and dignity of the person with respect to the demands of social and economic life..." (#68). Resting on Sunday witnesses to our culture that humans have a right to rest from work.



## The Day of Days Dies Dierum

As Christians, we believe that resting on Sunday was exemplified by God at the end of creation, and because of the Resurrection, the Church has good reason to stop one day a week to give thanks. Not only that, but as dignified human beings, we have a right to rest and there is no better day to do so than the Lord's Day. As human beings, there are two realities which we cannot possibly situate ourselves outside of; they are time and space. Space is often regarded as a thing of beauty, because it

can be arranged, beheld and appreciated, in and of itself. Time, however, has a tendency to simply be measured but God entering time through the Incarnation of His Son has revealed something very important about time's meaning. It reminds us that God is even the God of time, something we cannot control, and always wish there was more of. The fact that we wish there was more time points to the fact that there is something within us attracted to the infinite. As Christians, we truly believe that a day will come when time will cease, and we will experience never ending peace and bliss, and that day will come when Christ returns, which we call Parousia. Therefore, "Sunday foreshadows the last day, the day of the Parousia, which in a way, is already anticipated by Christ's glory in the event of the Resurrection" (Dies Domini #75). If all time finds its fulfillment in Christ's return, and Sunday is the day we dedicate to waiting for that return, then the whole week should find its fulfillment in Sunday. It becomes a day far greater than any other day, and it should be treated as such. We know that as a Church, we exclaim this by our weekly Sunday worship, but the other twenty-three hours of the day should be marked with celebration, rest and family. Let us, then, enjoy God's gift of Sunday!