

Session 10

Celebration, A time for the Community

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:46-47).

With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all (Acts 4:33).

And all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus (Acts 5:42).

“But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10: 43-45).

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who was a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off. So they, sent forth by the holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They had John also as their assistant (Acts 13:1-5).

D. Biblical Catechesis

1. *A day of communion.*

The Lord’s day makes us live the celebration as a time for others, a day of communion and mission. The Eucharist is the remembrance of Jesus’ action: this is the body given up, this is the blood shed for you and for everyone. “ For you and for everyone ” closely links fraternal life (for you) and openness to everyone (for the multitude). In the conjunction “and” lies all the power of the evangelizing mission of the family and the community: it is given to us so that it will be for everyone.



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The Church that is born from the Sunday Eucharist is open to all. The first form of mission is to build communion among believers, to make the community a family of families. This is also the fundamental law of the mission: the united and harmonious Church is the most persuasive witness for the world. The Church can become a school of mission only if it is the house of communion.

The passages from the Acts of the Apostles reported above offer us the image of the first communities that lived their Christian experience between the home and the temple. The celebration and Sunday are the moment for renewing ecclesial life so that the community of believers will take on the atmosphere of family life and the family will open up to the horizon of ecclesial communion.

The local Church and the parish are the concrete presence of the Gospel in the heart of human life. They are the most well known figures of the Church because of their characteristics of nearness and hospitality for all. In many countries, the parishes have indicated the “good life” according to the Gospel of Jesus and upheld the sense of belonging to the Church. As the Second Vatican Council states, in the local Churches “the Church...goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40). In the parish, families, which are the “domestic church”, act in such a way that the parish community will be a church in the midst of the people’s homes. Daily life, with its rhythm of work and celebration, allows the world to enter the home and opens the home to the world. On the other hand, the Christian community has to take care of families and remove them from the temptation to withdraw into themselves, into their “apartment”, and open them instead to the paths of faith.

In the family, life is transmitted as a gift and promise; in the parish, the promise contained in the gift of life is welcomed and nourished.

The Lord’s day becomes the day of the Church when it helps to experience the beauty of a Sunday lived together, avoiding the triviality of a consumerist weekend, in order to achieve at times experiences of fraternal communion among families.

2. A day of charity.

The Lord’s day as *dies ecclesiae* becomes the day of charity. The Church that is nourished at the Sunday Eucharist is the community at the service of all. The family, although not by itself, is the network in which this service is transmitted. The beautiful text from the Gospel of Mark reported above illustrates how in the Sunday Eucharist Jesus is in our midst as one who serves. This is the criterion of service in the community: those who want to be the greatest shall become small (your servant), and those who want to be first should dedicate themselves to the



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poor and the little ones (servant of all). The service of charity is a characteristic feature of the Christian Sunday. Some liturgical times (Advent and especially Lent) propose it as an essential task for the families and the community.

Sunday thus becomes the “day of charity”.

The service of charity expresses the desire for communion with God and our brothers and sisters. Throughout the week, the family responds to everyday needs, but family life cannot stop at just giving things and carrying out tasks: it must make the bond grow between persons, the good life in faith and charity. Without any experience of service at home or any practice of mutual aid and sharing in common difficulties, it will be hard for a heart to grow that is capable of love. In the family, children experience day after day their parents’ tireless dedication and their humble service, and they learn from their example the secret of love. When in the parish community the children and young people have to expand the horizon of charity to other people, they will be able to share the experience of love and service they learned at home. The practical teaching of charity, especially in families with only one child, should immediately open up to small or great forms of service to others.

A day for sending on a mission.

The missionary dimension of the Church is at the center of the Sunday Eucharist and opens the doors of family life to the world. The Sunday community is by definition a missionary community. In the beautiful icon from the Book of the Acts quoted above, the community of Antioch is depicted which, as it celebrates the Lord, perhaps on Sunday, it is encouraged by the Spirit to the mission. On the day of worship, the community becomes missionary. The mission not only concerns the individuals who are sent, but it also shows its efficacy when the whole Church, with the variety of its charismas, ministries and vocations, becomes the real sign of Christ’s charity for all people.

The missionary forms of the community are different, but all must lead people to Christ. The family is called to evangelize in its own irreplaceable way: inside the family, in its environment (neighbors, friends, relatives), in the ecclesial community, and in society.

The Eucharistic community will expand its outlook to a universal horizon by taking on Paul’s concern for all the Churches. If the missio ad gentes is the missionary horizon for the Church, the local Church, on its own territory, is also sent to proclaim the Gospel.

Education to welcoming others, those who are different or immigrants, should start from the families and get an impulse from the community. Even before this, it



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is often in the family where insight grows about a life spent for others, dedicated to the mission, and to commitment in the world. In many Christian families, with a great experience of humanity and love, and by attending the Sunday Eucharist, some splendid vocations have blossomed for service in society, commitment in volunteer work, witness in politics and the mission in the other countries of the world. The relation between Sunday and the Eucharist, between the Church and the mission, between the family and service to others, calls for a renewed task of introduction to the essentials of Christian life, which will spur a new missionary awareness. The extraordinary power of Sunday, centered on the domestic Eucharist, even brought the martyrs of Abitinia to martyrdom.

«Did you act against the rules of the emperors and the Caesars by gathering all of these together?». And the presbyter Saturninus, inspired by the Spirit of the Lord, answered: «We celebrated the Sunday Eucharist without worrying about them». The pro-consul asked: «Why?». He answered: «Because the Sunday Eucharist cannot be neglected» (IX). «In your home were meetings held against the emperors' decree?».

Emeritus, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: «In my home we celebrated the Sunday Eucharist». And the other said: «Why did you allow them to enter?». He replied: «Because they are my brothers and I could not have prevented it». «And yet – the pro-consul repeated – you had the duty to prevent it».

And he said: «I could not because we Christians cannot live without the Sunday Eucharist» (Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi et aliorum plurimorum Martyrum in Africa, XI).

In the first centuries, the Sunday Eucharist enabled the Church to spread to the confines of the world. Today, the daily life of the family and the Church is still invited to start again from there: without the Sunday Eucharist Christians cannot live.

E. Listening to the Magisterium

Sunday is the repetition of the brief cycle of weekly time, of the great mystery of Easter. It is also called the “little Easter Sunday”. “Living in accordance with the Lord’s day” means to live in the awareness of the liberation brought about by Christ so that his victory will be fully manifested to all men through a profoundly renewed existence. Sunday as a celebration for others should not be understood only from the liturgical viewpoint: it is a human value in addition to a Christian gift. Not living days that are all the same (and only Sunday has the secret of diversity), and dedicating time to the community and to charity is an effective way to liberate man from the servitude of work.



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Living in accordance with the Lord's day

From the beginning Christians were clearly conscious of this radical newness which the Eucharist brings to human life. The faithful immediately perceived the profound influence of the Eucharistic celebration on their manner of life. Saint Ignatius of Antioch expressed this truth when he called Christians "those who have attained a new hope," and described them as "those living in accordance with the Lord's Day" (iuxta dominicam viventes). This phrase of the great Antiochene martyr highlights the connection between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life. The Christians' customary practice of gathering on the first day after the Sabbath to celebrate the resurrection of Christ – according to the account of Saint Justin Martyr – is also what defines the form of a life renewed by an encounter with Christ. Saint Ignatius' phrase – "living in accordance with the Lord's Day" – also emphasizes that this holy day becomes paradigmatic for every other day of the week. Indeed, it is defined by something more than the simple suspension of one's ordinary activities, a sort of parenthesis in one's usual daily rhythm. Christians have always experienced this day as the first day of the week, since it commemorates the radical newness brought by Christ. Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the Eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have. "Living in accordance with the Lord's Day" means living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through a profoundly renewed existence. [Sacramentum Caritatis, 72]



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