Session 9

Celebration, A time for the Lord

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

As he was passing through a field of grain on the sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. At this the Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?" He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?

"Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath (Mk 2:23-27).

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.

So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now

the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead (Jn 21:1-14).

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D. Biblical Catechesis

1. Jesus, "Lord" of the sabbath.

Sunday begins as a weekly "memorial" of Jesus' resurrection. It celebrates the current "presence" of the Risen Lord, and awaits the "promise" of his glorious coming.

In the early period of Christianity, the dies dominicus did not replace the Hebrew sabbath immediately but existed in symbiosis with it. To understand this, we have to reflect on three moments: the relation between Jesus and the sabbath; the rise of the first day of the week; Sunday in the early centuries. In these three moments the spiritual and theological meaning of the Christian Sunday is pointed out as a memory, presence and promise.

In the Gospel, Jesus showed particular freedom with regard to the sabbath, so much so that his activity of performing miracles seems to be concentrated on that day. Think of the episode of the ears of wheat gathered on the sabbath (Mk 2:23-28; Mt 12:18; Lk 6:15); the healing of the man with the withered hand (Mk 3:16; Mt 12:9-14; Lk 6:6-11), the crippled woman (Lk 13:10- 17), and a man suffering from dropsy (Lk 14:1-6). The evangelist John puts the healing of the paralytic at the pool on the sabbath (Jn 5:1-18) and the account of the blind man from birth (Jn 9:1- 41). With regard to the sabbath, Jesus moves in a threefold perspective. First, Jesus confirms veneration for the commandment to observe the sabbath. Beyond the pharisees' legalistic practice, Jesus recognizes, lives and recommends the significance of the sabbath. The episode of the ears of wheat plucked on the sabbath interprets the Law in the light of God's will: "The sabbath is made for man, not man for the sabbath". The purpose of the sabbath is human life in fullness (Mk 3:4; Mt 12:11-12). Second, Jesus completes the meaning of the sabbath by liberating man from evil. The sabbath is the summit of God's work and man is created for the authentic sabbath: that is, communion with God. Jesus' mission is carried out in offering humanity the grace to fulfill its vocation for which God created it from the beginning. This holds especially for those who are wounded in their bodies and souls: the sick, the crippled, the blind and sinners.

The sabbath is the day of Jesus' acts of liberation. Finally, Jesus is the "Lord" of the sabbath. By renewing the work of creation and liberation from evil, Jesus reveals himself as the fullness of life, the end of the commandment regarding the sabbath.

Jesus is the Lord of the sabbath because he is the Son, and as the Son he introduces us into the fullness of the sabbath.

To experience the "presence" of the Risen Lord, the family should let itself be enlightened by the Sunday Eucharist. The celebration of Mass becomes the living,

beating heart of the Lord's day, of his presence here and today as the Risen Lord. The Eucharist lets us reach the shore of God's holy mystery. On Sunday, the family finds the center of the week, the day that preserves its everyday life. This happens when the family asks itself: can we find the mystery of God together? In its simplicity, the celebration lets the "mystery" of God reach us. The ritual puts the family in contact with the source of life, communion with God and fraternal communion. In fact, it does much more: the Christian mystery is the new life of the Risen Jesus who makes himself present in the Eucharistic assembly. The Sunday Eucharist is the center of Sunday and the celebration. In it the family receives the new life of the Risen Lord, accepts the gift of the Spirit, listens to the Word, shares the Eucharistic bread, and expresses itself in fraternal love. For this reason, Sunday is the lord of the days, the day of the encounter with the Risen Lord!

2. The " first day of the week".

Sunday is the "memorial" of Jesus' Resurrection. According to the concordant evangelical testimonies, Christ arose on the "first day of the week" (Mk 16:2,9; Mt 28:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1). On that day, all the events on which the Christian faith is founded took place: Jesus' resurrection, the paschal apparitions, the effusion of the Spirit. The early Christians took up the Hebrew weekly rhythm, but starting from the resurrection, they gave fundamental importance to the "first day after the sabbath" (Lk 24:1). In the framework of this day John and Luke place the remembrance of the meals taken with the Risen Lord (Lk 24:13-35; and Jn 21:1-14) and color them with Eucharistic features. The text of John 21 expresses well the atmosphere of the Eucharistic meetings of the early Christian communities. Jesus "took, gave thanks and distributed" the bread broken (Jn 21:12, 9-14) and was "recognized in breaking the bread" (Lk 24:30,35). In continuity with Jesus' meals, the "meetings" are put on the first day of the week, which are recalled in Acts 20:7 as the moment for the community assembly to "break bread" and listen to the apostle's word, as mentioned in 1 Cor 16:2, and the day to take up the collection for the poor of Jerusalem. So Sunday implies three elements: listening to the Word, breaking the bread for fraternal sharing, and charity. Later, in Rev 1:10, it will be called the "Lord's Day". The early Church thus affirms the bond of continuity and difference with the sabbath. The "Lord's day" is the day of the memorial of the resurrection.

By taking part in Mass, the family dedicates space and time, offers energies and resources, and learns that life is not just made up of needs to be satisfied but of relationships to be built. The gratuity of the Sunday Eucharist calls for the family to take part in the memorial of Jesus' resurrection. In the Mass the family nourishes itself at the table of the word and the bread, which give flavor and meaning to the words and the food shared at table in the home.

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From early childhood children should be educated to listen to the word by taking up what they heard in the community again at home. This will enable them to discover Sunday as the "Lord's day". The encounter with the Risen Jesus, at the center of Sunday, must feed on the memorial of Jesus, the Gospel account, the reality of the bread broken and the body given up. The memorial of the Crucified Risen Lord marks the difference between Sunday and free time: if we do not encounter Him, the celebration does not take place, communion is just a feeling, and charity is reduced to a gesture of solidarity which does not build the Christian community and educate to the mission. As it introduces us into God's heart, the Sunday Eucharist makes the family, and in some way the family, in the Christian community, makes the Eucharist.

Sunday in the early centuries.

In the earliest period of the Church's life, Sunday and the Eucharist on the Lord's day also put great emphasis on the expectation of the Lord's coming.

St. Justin, a philosopher and martyr, left us an evocative image of the Christian community gathered together on the "Lord's day", which corresponds to the day after the sabbath.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need (Cfr. The First Apology, Chapter 37).

Sunday is the day for the Christians' assembly and it lets us feel the atmosphere of the first communities that lived the Sunday Eucharist as an "anticipation" of the new life given by the Risen Lord and a "promise" of the transformation of the world. Today the Church and the family are called once again to this gushing spring so that the originality of the Christian Sunday will not be lost. Especially during some periods of the year, such as Advent and Christmas, the expectation of the Lord's coming is renewed through the actions that nurture a sense of hope in the family and the community.

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E. Listening to the Magisterium

The family is jealous of Sunday, the "day of joy and rest": this is how the Second Vatican Council defines it in the Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. It should be jealous of Sunday not so much as a free day of collective rest or a popular feast, but above all as the "Lord's day": that is, the day of the Eucharistic assembly from which all of Christian life starts and towards which it converges (source and culmination), in unity of time and place. The other aspects of Sunday come later; they are important but not essential. The Eucharistic assembly is necessary for the family. The Christian family organizes its life and educates itself and its children so that it can give Mass precedence over any other commitments.

Sunday, the Lord's day

By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day; with good reason this, then, bears the name of the Lord's day or Sunday. For on this day Christ's faithful are bound to come together into one place so that by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, and may thank God who "has begotten them again, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto a living hope" (1 Pt 1:3).

Hence the Lord's day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work. Other celebrations, unless they be truly of greatest importance, shall not have precedence over the Sunday which is the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year. [Sacrosanctum Concilium, 106]

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F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

Questions for the couple

1. How are Sunday and the encounter with the Risen Lord felt in our family?
2. Do the actions and rituals at home and in the community make it possible to perceive the new life of the Risen Lord and the joy of His presence?
3. Does the experience of the gratuity of things and time, listening to the Word at home and in church, and the shared Eucharistic table let us live Sunday as a weekly Easter?
4. At what moments of the year in particular, and through what actions do we experience the Sunday Eucharist as a time of waiting and hope?

Questions for the family group and the community

1. In today's society, what impedes us from living Sunday as dies dominicus (the Lord's day)?
2. Do education to the ritual and the atmosphere of the Christian community really introduce us into the encounter with the Crucified and Risen Lord?
3. How can Sunday become the day of the Gospel and the memorial of Jesus' resurrection?
4. In what way does the path of the liturgical year, with its times and celebrations, express the expectation of the Lord?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn