

“Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, your God. No working may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slaves, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the Lord has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Ex. 20:8-11)

- The Lord God creates the irrevocable and external covenant with His chosen people, the Israelites, and the covenant is established and confirmed by keeping the Sabbath day holy. The Sabbath of God’s covenant recalls the creation of the universe and the liberation of His chosen people from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:15), and the Sabbath of the Lord’s covenant prefigures the day of the Resurrection when creation was restored to its original beauty and dignity. This is the day when the slavery to sin and death was conquered, the Lord’s Day, Sunday; the day of the New Covenant completes and perfects the Old and is now the “first day.” (CCC, 2174)
- What the Jewish Sabbath confirmed and made holy for them and for human history, the Lord’s Day, Sunday “fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and announces man’s eternal rest in God. For worship under the Law prepared for the mystery of Christ...” (CCC, 2175) From the Apostolic times Sunday has enjoyed the preeminence of the first day of the every week, but the keeping of the Lord’s Day by the Church has always been lived not as a burden but as a solemn and joyful duty. “The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and His Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life.” (CCC, 2177)
- Let us look at what is the foundation of the Church teaching in our Sunday “obligation.” This teaching has its root in the cardinal virtue of Justice. First, what is a virtue? “A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows a person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself.” (CCC, 1803) Now, what is the cardinal virtue of Justice? “Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the ‘virtue of religion’” (CCC, 1807)

- The “virtue of religion” which applies directly to every person means that we owe God everything- our very lives, all our talents, all our possessions. God, who is all-perfect and therefore lacks nothing, deserves “the best of ourselves.” (CCC, 1803) The first way we practice the “virtue of religion” is to give to God our best worship and do so constantly. We do this by our personal and communal prayer in word and acts. Our best act of worship of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the Mass.
- The best we human beings can give to God in this world is what He Himself gave us, His Body and Blood in the Eucharistic Sacrifice initiated at the Last Supper. So to come to Sunday Mass every week is the very best way we can cultivate and strengthen our virtue of religion and in turn be holy as the Lord Himself is holy. Again, since “The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of Christian practice” (CCC 2181), the Church teaches us that it is an obligation we have and owe to God and, as such, we should desire and want to do this more than anything else.
- Pope St. John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* (the Day of the Lord) said: “I strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday: Do not be afraid to give your time to Christ! Yes, let us open our time to Christ, that He may cast light upon it and give it direction... Time given to Christ is never time lost, but is rather time gained, so that our relationships and indeed our whole life may become more profoundly human.” (DD, 7)

“Sunday is the day of joy and the day of rest precisely because it is ‘the Lord’s Day,’ the day of the Risen Lord. Understood and lived in this fashion, Sunday in a way becomes the soul of the other days, and in this sense we can recall the insight of Origen that the perfect Christian ‘is always in the Lord’s Day, and is always celebrating Sunday.’” (DD, 82-83)
- Pope Benedict XVI in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (The Sacrament of Charity), spoke to the Church about “living according to the Lord’s Day.” Pope Benedict is citing and using this term which was coined by the great Father of the Church, St. Ignatius of Antioch. The Pope applies this to our obligation as Catholics to observe Sunday by our worship of God at Mass in

communion with our brothers and sisters, but also to live Sunday and every day of the week just as we have worshiped God at Mass.

- Pope Benedict XVI said: “This phrase of the great Antiochene martyr highlights the connections 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 St. Justin Martyr- is also what defines the form of a life renewed by an encounter with Christ... Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the Eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have.” (SC, 72)
- What both Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI are teaching us is what the Church from the time of the Apostles has taught us. If we are to be known by Christ and His Church as His disciples, we must observe the “Lord’s Day,” His day. If we lose the will and desire to share in the celebration of the Eucharist and its commemoration of the Paschal victory over sin and death, our life of faith and discipleship is endangered. To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord’s Day, a day to be kept holy, is symptomatic of the loss of an authentic sense of Christian freedom. In other words, by not keeping the Lord’s Day as His Church does, one detaches oneself from the true Vine, Christ, and one attaches oneself to the world which we know has not and cannot save.
- Pope Benedict recalls Pope St. John Paul II’s *Dies Domini (Day of the Lord)* in order to underscore what Sunday is and why every Catholic should want to celebrate Sunday at Mass. He repeated Pope St. John Paul II: “He said that it is *Dies Domini* with regard to the work of creation, *Dies Christi* or the day of the new creation and the Risen Lord’s gift of the Holy Spirit, *Dies Ecclesiae* as the day on which the Christian community gathers for the celebration, and *Dies hominis* as the day of joy, rest and fraternal charity.” (SC, 73)
- The “Day of the Lord,” Sunday, is the priceless gift handed down to us from the Lord’s Apostles. It is our inheritance as Catholics for our salvation and that of the

world. It is especially necessary for us to be at Mass and participate in the Mass, receiving His Body and Blood, so that we stand in opposition to the culture which is working to relegate the faith to the margins of life and make it irrelevant. As Pope Benedict XVI said: “The futility of this way of living- ‘as if God did not exist’- is now evident to everyone. Today there is a need to rediscover that Jesus Christ is not just a private conviction or an abstract idea, but a real person, whose becoming part of human history is capable of renewing the life of every man and woman.” (SC, 77)

- Pope Francis has been giving the Church an excellent catechesis on prayer every Wednesday at his weekly general audience. At his last audience for 2020 on December 31st he said of the prayer of the Thanksgiving of which the Holy Eucharist is our perfect expression: “The prayer of thanksgiving always begins here: to recognize that grace precedes us. We were thought of before we learned to think; we were loved before we learned how to love; we were desired before our hearts conceived a desire.” To understand Sunday Mass the way Pope Francis describes our Church’s prayer of Thanksgiving, there is no better way for us to have that holy communion with the Lord. We should want to be with Him every Sunday because it is His Day which He has made our day.
- As Pope Benedict XVI concluded his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, he recounted an ancient Christian narrative which sums up what we Catholics believe and know to be true about our celebration of the Lord’s Day.

“At the beginning of the fourth century, Christian worship was still forbidden by the imperial authorities. Some Christians in North Africa, who felt bound to celebrate the Lord’s Day, defied the prohibition. They were martyred after declaring that it was not possible for them to live without the Eucharist, the food of the Lord: *sine dominico non possumus*. May these martyrs of the Abitinae, in union with all those saints and beati who made the Eucharist the center of their lives, intercede for us and teach us to be faithful to our encounter with the risen Christ.

We too cannot live without partaking of the Sacrament of our salvation; we too desire to be living according to the Lord's Day, to reflect in our lives what we celebrate on the Lord's Day. That day is the day of our definitive deliverance. Is it surprising then, that we should wish to live every day in that newness of life which Christ has brought us in the mystery of the Eucharist?" (SC, 95)

Resources

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Part Three, Section Two, Article 3; THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Code of Canon Law. Revised, 1983. Book IV, Title II, Chapter I, Canons 1246-1248.

Dies Domini. Apostolic Letter of Pope St. John Paul II, May 31, 1998.

Ecclesia de Eucharistia. Encyclical Letter of Pope St. John Paul II, April 17, 2003.

Sacramentum Caritatis. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, February 22, 2007.

A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist. Dom Anscar Vonier

The Introduction to the Devout Life. St. Francis de Sales

Behold the Mystery, A Deeper Understanding of the Catholic Mass. Mark Hart

Book of Readings on the Eucharist. USCCB Committee on the Liturgy, 2006.