

THE FIRST SUNDAY FAMILY MEAL

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Unleash the Gospel puts a high priority on encouraging families, “the first and most important ... social unit in which life in Christ, the life of the Church, is experienced and lived.” Pope Francis in *Amoris Lætitia*, his exhortation on “*Love in the Family*,” wrote “the joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.” He taught that “participation in the Sunday Eucharist” is important to family spiritual growth and to developing “solidarity” among family members. The Pope and our Archbishop both ask us to embrace a journey of prayer as a family, and to place our highest priority on Sunday worship together.

The Mass is both a Sacrifice and a Eucharistic banquet where we receive our “food for the journey.” The Pope reminds us that the food of the Eucharist offers spouses and parents strength to live each day as a “domestic church.” We should approach the **Eucharist as the first “family meal” of Sunday**. This is true for the larger “parish family” and well as individual households (one- or two-parent, multi-generational, or extended), but it holds especially for homes with children. Receiving Jesus in the Bread of the Eucharist at Sunday Mass as a family puts Him at the center of relationships among family members and enriches all.

Unleash the Gospel charges families to reclaim their relationship with God and to “re-claim Sunday” by attending Mass together as a family (*Action Step 1.3.1*). We do this for God and ourselves since “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Time for worship is a gift from the Father who drew the Israelites away from false gods. He does the same for us. But what do we now hold at a higher Sunday priority than worshiping God at Mass? Do we let ourselves to be distracted by Sunday morning news “talking heads” rather than attending to the Good News at Mass? Do we give in to the temptation to “skip Mass” in favor of hockey practice or a soccer game rather than accept the invitation of the Spirit to join in the eternal worship? Do we “worship” a fine sunny morning in the garden planting begonias, instead of planting ourselves in a pew and basking in the light of Christ’s love?



Jesus said: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). Let us open the door and join with Jesus in this first family meal each Sunday. (Next week: The “second” Sunday family meal.)

THE SECOND SUNDAY FAMILY MEAL

Last week we discussed how **Unleash the Gospel** asks families to embrace participating in Mass on Sundays as a family, to share the Eucharist together as the “first Sunday family meal.” Worshiping on Sunday (or at the Saturday Vigil) is simply one part of obeying the Third Commandment: “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath.” Another part is **to rest**. Rest from work

recalls that God, after the Creation, rested on the seventh day, and that He had freed the Israelites from the slavery of forced work in Egypt. We are freed not only *for* worship but *from* work on this one day. Of course, some of us must work on Sundays, but we should not permit ourselves to be enslaved by our work and always set aside time for “re-Creation” and being together with our families.

When Archbishop Vigneron challenges families to “re-claim Sunday,” he means us not only to attend Mass as a family, but also to “...intentionally spend time with one another, including sharing a meal together” (*Action Step 1.3.1*). Rest on Sunday gives us time for leisure and for a leisurely meal. When the Archbishop charges us to “create time for regular family meals without distraction to **reclaim its sacred nature**” (*Action Step 1.3.3*), he means the sacred nature of not only the meal but the family, too! He invites us to be holy, to “create a home where your family models Christ’s love.” Families are asked to “become aware of your neighbor’s needs and reach out to them with a welcoming spirit so as to share your faith.” We are asked to be generous, to invite family and friends to join us in our leisure.



Pope Francis wrote in *Amoris Laetitia* that love in the family is called “to foster a culture of encounter [with Jesus] ... helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters,” as an extended family in Christ. Francis challenges families even more, to promote “fundamental human bonds” in our communities by being open and caring for family and friends and by building friendships with neighbors and those less fortunate. Jesus Himself reminded us, when we give a dinner, to include the poor among our family and neighbors “... and you will be blessed” (Luke 14:12-14).

By setting aside time on Sundays for rest and leisure, by relaxing with families and neighbors, and by generously sharing this second Sunday family meal together, Pope Francis reminds us that we “will be blessed! Here is the secret to a happy family.”

Note: *Amoris Laetitia* is Pope Francis’ 2016 Apostolic Exhortation on “Love in the Family” available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html