

Pulled Quote: “The obligation to participate in Mass on Sunday is more than a duty; it is a gift given us by the Lord himself. He calls his followers to be a community, a spiritual family, and our common worship on the Lord’s Day strengthens us for the mission we have as his disciples.” – Bishop John Folda

Headline: The day of the Lord

With the arrival of summer, many of us will spend more time outdoors, on vacation, visiting with family and friends, and playing sports. After a long, hard winter, the warmer weather is especially welcome, and time for recreation and even outdoor work will be a blessing. When I have time for it, I enjoy going out to pull weeds and trim bushes in the yard at my home, and of course, I attempt to get some vacation time during summer as well. Even bishops need time off now and then!

But for us Catholics, there is no vacation from God, nor should we want such a thing. No matter the time of year or the activities on offer, our relationship with God must continue uninterrupted. This is true in a particular way when we consider Sunday, the Lord’s Day. I know that weekends during the summer can be busy with outings, days at the lake, sports activities, and vacations to other parts of the country, but none of these activities should take us away from our Lord and from the celebration of Mass. In fact, it bears remembering that every Catholic is obliged to attend Mass on Sunday, the Lord’s Day (which can include Saturday vigil Masses). Mass times for all our parishes can be found on the diocesan website at www.fargodiocese.org.

Sunday, after all, is the day of our Lord’s resurrection. Jesus rose from the tomb on Easter Sunday, on the first day of the week, and from that moment on, Christians have regarded Sunday as the new “Day of the Lord.” Because of the resurrection, Sunday is no longer just another day of the week. In fact, you could even say that every Sunday is a kind of “mini-Easter,” a day when we remember and celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, especially through the celebration of the Paschal Mystery at Mass. When we celebrate the Mass, we celebrate and actually participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and Sunday is set aside in a special way for this sacred time with the Lord.

Sunday is also the day of Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles who were gathered in prayer after the Ascension of Jesus. Once again, on the first day of the week, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and sent them out into the world, filled with the power and gifts that would allow them to carry out the mission that Jesus had entrusted to them. Pentecost Sunday is sometimes called “the birthday of the Church,” because it was on Pentecost that the early Church was born in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All the more reason then, to participate in the Mass on Sunday, to remember and relive that outpouring of the Holy Spirit that happens in every liturgical celebration.

The obligation to participate in Mass on Sunday is more than a duty; it is a gift given us by the Lord himself. He calls his followers to be a community, a spiritual family, and our common worship on the Lord’s Day strengthens us for the mission we have as his disciples. When we gather together on the Lord’s Day, we support and pray for each other, and for all our fellow believers around the world. The Lord’s Day is an opportunity to step back from the pressures and busyness of daily life, and to dedicate our attention fully to God.

Attendance at Sunday Mass has been falling for many years, and this should be a concern to all of us. If we choose some other activity over the hour or so that we would spend at Mass, then we’re effectively turning our backs on the Lord and the gifts he offers us in his Word, in the Eucharist, and in the Church. If we place other pursuits ahead of Sunday Mass on our list of priorities, then we miss out on the greatest spiritual gifts we could imagine. The more faithfully we attend and participate in Sunday Mass, the more we open ourselves to receive the grace that our Lord wishes to give us. However, the more we distance ourselves from the Mass, the more we distance ourselves from Christ, which is the very meaning of sin. Parents especially should remember that they have a serious responsibility to form their own children in the faith. Without the Mass, that formation most likely will never happen.

It’s good to remember that we attend Mass not because God needs it but because we need it. Our Lord knows that we cannot be the full disciples he calls us to be unless we hear his word proclaimed,

participate in his sacrifice of the Eucharist, and take an active role in his Church. God deserves our worship because he is God, and we worship him because this is part of who we are. As St. Augustine wisely wrote centuries ago, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

That notion of rest is also worth considering. Too often, we become so preoccupied with the affairs of the world that we forget the Lord of the world. He gives us Sunday as a day of rest, a day for family, and a day for works of mercy. I know full well that the world we live in functions differently, and perhaps, in some cases, we can't avoid working on Sunday to make a living for those we love. But even so, the character of the Lord's Day should not be forgotten, and we should do everything we can to be present to God and to our families.

Dear brothers and sisters, as a good mother, the Church gently guides us to what will be for our benefit and lasting happiness, so she calls us together every Sunday to pray and celebrate the mercy and grace of God. Pope Benedict XVI was fond of quoting the martyrs of Africa, who exclaimed, “Without the Sunday Eucharist, we cannot live!” The same is true for us. I look forward to seeing you on Sunday!