

These have been challenging times for each and every one of us without exception. As a priest, I continue to have the great privilege and responsibility to walk with individuals who are suffering in their family and marriage lives, work lives, spiritual lives and a myriad of other challenges. Others have walked with me and gratefully given me hope and encouragement.

Pope Francis summed up our current situation in his own succinct way when he, at a recent Audience talk, stated: “The current pandemic has highlighted our interdependence: we are all linked to each other, for better or for worse.” We live in a global village. It means being neighbors, being together, loving and respecting each other. For sure social media links us together, for better or for worse, in new and novel ways.

I thought I would reflect today briefly on our spiritual lives at this unique time in our history. Each of us is called anew, after all, to be spiritual leaders in our families and with each other. At the top of the list, it is a time to reflect on the importance and centrality of the Eucharist, particularly the Sunday Eucharist, in our lives as followers of Jesus. Twice, in the documents, the Second Vatican Council called the Eucharist “the source and summit of our lives” as followers of Jesus.

Even in the midst of this time when Sunday is not celebrated publicly and liturgically as it is meant to be celebrated, and where a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass is temporarily in force in this Archdiocese, and in other dioceses, this is still a good time to come to understand better the theological and pastoral place of the Sunday Eucharist in Catholic life.

In the words of St. Augustine, Sunday is “a sacrament of Easter.” And Easter is the heart of our Christian faith-- for each and every one of us privileged to be baptized into the new life of the Lord Jesus.

“In fact, in the weekly reckoning of time, Sunday recalls the day of Christ’s Resurrection. It is Easter which returns week by week, celebrating Christ’s victory over sin and death, the fulfillment in Him of the first creation and the dawn of ‘the new creation.’” Dies Domini(DD) 1 The Resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental event upon which our Christian faith rests. We can never, never forget this. If Sunday recalls the resurrection, and it does, then that is why Sunday is at the heart and soul of every Christian’s spirituality.

So important is the centrality of Easter, and hence every Sunday, that St. John Paul II issued a most memorable apostolic letter entitled Dies Domini, (The Day of the Lord), a letter which I come back to often for meditation and reflection .

Scripture reveals the importance of that “first day of the week” in the beautiful Easter readings that we annually hear during Easter week. From Mark, Luke and John, we hear the various accounts of the empty tomb--each with a little different twist. But what they have in common is that each took place “on the first day of the week.” (Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1) That is the first day after the Sabbath (or Sunday). Remember also that most beautiful account about the journey to Emmaus. It also took place on “that very day” (on Sunday) when the Risen Lord joined them and they ultimately came to know Him in the breaking of the bread and while their hearts were burning when He broke open the scripture to them. (Lk 24: 13-35) Then again, the Risen Lord appeared to the eleven in the upper room “on the evening of that first day of the week.” (Jn 20:19; Lk 24:36)

Each of these magnificent readings echoes the joy--for sure uncertain at first but then overwhelming-- which the Apostles had to have experienced in the presence of the Risen Lord once they recognized Him

and especially on the evening of the first day of the week when He visited them in the upper room and gave them His gift of peace and the Holy Spirit.

It is that same joy that we pray penetrates each of us in special fashion on the “first day of the week,” every Sunday, when we come together for Mass (in normal times), or for prayer, when we rest from our labors and when we spend time with family and friends and engage in works of charity. These are all ways in which we come to experience risen life, His life. These are ways in which our spiritual lives are enhanced and developed. Sunday distinguishes, or should, each of us as followers of Jesus. In what we do on Sunday, we give witness about who we are.

Although it is true that Sunday Eucharist is not different from the Eucharist celebrated on other days of the week, the Pope writes that “the Sunday Eucharist (precisely because it is celebrated on the day when Christ conquered death and gave us a share forever in His immortal life) expresses with greater emphasis its inherent ecclesial dimension. It becomes the paradigm for other Eucharistic celebrations.” DD 34 Why is this especially true for Sunday? Because of its special solemnity and the obligatory presence of the whole Catholic community, “each community, gathering all its members for the ‘breaking of the bread,’ becomes the place where the mystery of the Church is concretely made present.” DD 34 There is an old saying: the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church. That happens at holy Mass and Sunday in particular. The Eucharist is the heart of Sunday and the indispensable element of our identity as Catholics.

The Mass in fact truly makes present the sacrifice of the Cross. And we know that we cannot celebrate Good Friday without celebrating Easter Sunday. They are two sides of the same coin. Together they make up the Paschal or Easter Mystery, a mystery into which we are inserted by virtue of our baptism. Remember how St. Paul teaches us: “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” Rom 6:4 It is that life that we celebrate each and every time we gather for Eucharist, especially on Sunday which is the Lord’s Day. The Eucharist is the Risen Lord. It is a yearning that we all have, consciously or not, in these challenging times of pandemic.

After all, Sunday, the Lord’s Day, the Day of the Resurrection is at the heart and soul of lay spirituality and the spirituality of each of us. There can be no better formula to discover the Risen Lord in our lives and to share His love with others. Is that not what our faith is all about? Is not Sunday in effect a synthesis of the entire Christian life? Hopefully this meditation will challenge you, as it does me, to examine your own life and the role Sunday presently plays in your spirituality, especially in this time when Sunday, of necessity, has not played such a central role in our faith lives as Catholics because of the pandemic.

To conclude:

At this particular time, we take refuge in the inspired words of St. Paul. He writes: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? Yet in all this we are more than conquerors because of him who has love us.” Romans 8:35, 37

And He still does, particularly at holy Mass, pandemic or not.

God Bless,
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