

Honoring the Lord's Day

(Presented Sept. 9-10, 2017)

A few weeks ago, we announced changes to our Sunday morning schedule, which will take effect when we return upstairs to our newly restored church, on the weekend of October 7 & 8. If you have not yet read Fr. Tom's letter explaining the changes and our plans for Sunday mornings, we encourage you to do so. You can find it on our parish website and Facebook page.

In addition to the letter, we have decided to offer a series of brief reflections over four consecutive Sundays, in which we go a little deeper into what we hope to achieve by the upcoming changes. This week, we will focus on the importance of Sunday in the life of the Christian.

Sunday is known as the Lord's Day, as it has been called since the time of the Apostles. Indeed this day belongs to the Lord. It is the day of the Resurrection – the event that defines our faith. It is a little Easter every week, a day that beckons us to remember the work of God, past, present, and future – the work of creation, of redemption, and of fulfillment. It is a day to rejoice in what God has done, continues doing, and will yet accomplish in, for, and through us. It allows us to situate our own experience – the joys and the burdens of life as a “pilgrim people” – within the larger reality of God's plan of salvation for us. Above all, Sunday is a day to worship the Lord with praise and thanksgiving.

It is not as easy as it used to be to keep the Lord's Day holy. For various cultural reasons, it has become more difficult for Christians to observe Sunday as a day of worship, rest, and recreation. Many people are required to work, attend classes or take exams. Sports, entertainment activities, and social events compete for our time on Sundays. With so many obligations and distractions, it is no wonder that for so many people the observance of Sunday as the Lord's Day has become an afterthought.

We want to encourage you to reclaim the meaning of Sunday with a new intensity and an open heart to receive the gift and blessing that coincides with making the Lord's Day intentionally different. In the words of St. John Paul II, Sunday “must be protected and above all must be lived in all its depth” (*Dies Domini (The Lord's Day)*, Apostolic Letter of Pope St. John Paul II, n, 30). We invite you to seek a deeper understanding of the mystery that makes this day radically different, and to allow your prayer life to become a relational exchange with the Divine Persons.

Central to the observance of the Lord's Day is the celebration of the Eucharist – the Sunday Mass – which is the most significant activity of the parish, the “source and summit” of our life (*Lumen Gentium (Light of Nations)*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican

Council, n. 11). It is in our Eucharistic worship as a community that our identity as Catholic Christians is most clearly and powerfully expressed. We will have more to say about our Sunday worship next week.

We can attend Mass, and fulfill our “Sunday obligation”, in the morning, in the evening, and even on Saturday evening, since we understand the Lord’s Day to begin with Evening Prayer on Saturday, a reckoning of time that the Church has appropriated from her Jewish roots. Whenever we choose to come, however, our Sunday observance ought not be reduced or limited to attendance at Mass. The whole day needs to be kept holy, as a “grateful and active remembrance of God’s saving work” (*Dies Domini*, n. 52). This includes in the way we approach our relationships, our rest, our recreation, and the other activities we may choose or be required to undertake throughout the day. Ultimately, it means moving beyond simply fulfilling an obligation; not being content with the minimum, but striving for greatness, for the life of holiness and virtue to which we are all called.

Our hope is that the changes we are making to our Sunday schedule will afford us the opportunity to deepen our observance of the Lord’s Day: to give honor to Him through fitting worship – worship that is beautiful and engaging, worship in spirit and in truth – and to go deeper in our personal development as disciples; in our communal life as a family of faith; and in our mission to share what we have received with those around us.

Over the next three weeks, we will look at these dimensions in more detail: our life of worship, the call to discipleship in community, and the mission to evangelize.