

SUNDAY – THE LORD'S DAY

- The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead occurred on a Sunday (see Jn. 20:1-9). The Holy Spirit came down on the apostles on Pentecost Sunday. For Christians, Sunday came to be called “the Lord’s Day.”

Sanctifying the Lord’s Day with Worship

- The tradition of Sunday worship has been handed down from the apostles themselves. It is first documented in Scripture itself, when the Acts of the Apostles records a group of Christians having gathered together “to break bread” on the first day of the week (see Acts 20:7).
- This could be understood merely as having an ordinary meal, but from other early Christian writings we know that the phrase “to break bread” referred to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, that is, to what we today call the Mass.
- Very early Christian writings give unequivocal witness to this tradition. *The Didache*, or the “Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” is an extremely early work, almost certainly written before 100 AD, and possibly decades earlier. It speaks of gathering together, breaking bread, and giving thanksgiving—to be done every Lord’s Day.
- In about 107 AD, *St. Ignatius of Antioch* specifically wrote of the deliberate replacement of the Sabbath with

Sunday: “Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath, but the Lord’s Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death” (*Ad Magn.* 9, 1; CCC 2175).

- Around 155 AD, *St. Justin Martyr* wrote to the Roman emperor: “On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place” (*Apol.* 1, 65-67; CCC 1345), and then went on to describe Sunday worship, unmistakably the Mass.
- Worshipping God at Mass on the Lord’s Day is an obligation to be taken very seriously. The first precept of the Church spells out the Catholic’s obligation to attend Mass on all Sundays (and holy days of obligation).
- Unless there is a serious reason—for example, illness, unavoidable travel to locations where there is no Mass, dangerous weather conditions—failure to attend Mass on Sunday is seriously sinful.
- By participating in the celebration of Mass, we show that we belong to a community of faith, and that we are faithful to Christ and his Church..

Sanctifying the Lord’s Day with Rest

- God has designed us for lives that have a rhythm of work and rest. We sanctify the Lord’s Day not only by participating in Mass, but also by resting.

- Of course, work cannot entirely be removed from Sundays. Hospitals and nursing homes must be staffed, and children need care. However, we must be careful not to develop habits that make Sunday like any other day of the week.
- Only rarely does shopping need to be done on Sunday. The lawn can be mowed and the car washed another day. Children's sports need not take up Saturday and Sunday
- Making a greater effort to sanctify the Lord's Day includes avoiding activities that force others to work. Both public and private employers have an obligation to ensure that employees have needed time for rest and worship.
- Finally, Jesus' example shows that good works, such as care for the sick, infirm, poor, and elderly, are ways to sanctify the Lord's Day. Good works can also include ministries that serve the Church, such as catechesis of children and adults. These should not unduly take away from the claims of the family.
- In a culture that seems to force us to live at an ever-faster pace, the Church's reinforcement of God's commandment to rest, relax, and enjoy the day are especially needed. We all need leisure to spend time with our families, to strengthen social ties, to expand our cultural horizons, and to deepen our spiritual lives. Sunday can also be a fun-day with the family.