

Homily for Easter Sunday 2016
 Acts 10:34a, 37–43
 Psalm 118:1–2, 16–17, 22–23
 1 Corinthians 5:6b–8
 John 20:1–9

For Roman Catholics Sunday is the most important day of the week because it is the Day of the Resurrection. Therefore to attend Mass on this day is always mandatory and is never optional. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is unequivocal in stating the importance of this day:

The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life. "Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church.... Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.

(Catechism 2177 & 2181)

Now some of you may be wondering: Why is the Catholic Church so insistent on the compulsory nature of the Sunday Liturgy? Sure its important... but come on Catechism lighten up.... two out of four, or three out of four Sunday's a month isn't bad.... Surely this is good enough?

No, it is not - because of what Sunday is and what it is to accomplish in the souls of the faithful.

The Sunday Mass is so important because it is like a GPS that orientates our life aright and in turn equips and calls us to live in the world as people of the Resurrection.

The Sunday Mass allows us to week by week locate our lives within the context of God's purposes and so live with true meaning and direction because it is the Resurrection that rightly orientates our lives.

Let me explain what I mean by this with reference to John's Gospel. Twice St. John tells us in chapter twenty that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ took place on the first day of the week. This detail has a deep theological significance. St John wants his readers to understand that this day is the start of God's new creation. Now think back to Good Friday. If Sunday is the first day of the week, what is Good Friday? It is the sixth day. On that day, Jesus stands before Pilate, who declares to the assembled mob: "behold the man". (John 19.5). Now please recall with me Genesis chapter one. On which day was mankind created? It was on the sixth day. Pilate by designating Jesus as the Man is echoing the sixth day of creation. On the Cross John then shows us how Jesus finishes the work the Father had given him to do, ending in chapter 19.20 with the triumphant declaration "it is finished." This corresponds to the completion of creation itself in Genesis chapter 2. There follows, as in Genesis, a day of rest; and then while it is still dark, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb, on the first day of the week. St John wants us to view Jesus' public career as the completion of the original creation, with the Resurrection as the start of the New Creation. The whole of the Gospel is to be seen therefore as a preparation for Easter and a retelling of the opening chapters of Genesis.

This is so important for us to understand, because we are to place our own lives in the context of this new creation. It is interesting to note that in Genesis, days one to six have a clear time demarcation. With each of the first six days there is the formula:

there was evening and there was morning the first day, the second day and so on.

However when it comes to the Sabbath day, this is not mentioned because the seventh day is to be the day that governs every other day and is seen as a continuous day. Therefore, it does not have this same kind of demarcation of evening and morning.

For us who live in the light of the Resurrection of Christ the first day of the week is to be understood in this same manner. It is the day that orientates and governs every other day of the week. If we neglect Sunday and see it is just one of the seven then we so easily forget our true identity as people of the Resurrection who now live our Monday to Saturday lives governed by the new creation.

This has great implications for us. It is as we weekly remember our true orientation as those who belong to the new creation, established by the Resurrection that we can in turn be equipped and called to live the rest of our lives as witnesses to the Resurrection.

The word used for witness is translated into English by the word martyr. When we think of this word, we equate it with someone who dies for their faith. And while this is a narrower meaning of the word martyr its larger meaning is defined as “a witness”. This is the kind of witness that is so committed to Christ that everything else is governed by relationship to him. The earliest apostles and disciples were such witness because their lives were orientated to the Resurrection of Jesus. Every other aspect of their lives was understood in relationship to the Resurrection.

When we see our lives orientated to the Resurrection we then are able to understand the calling on our life is one where we recognize the old ways governed by the world are out of tune with the new creation established by the Resurrection. When we live centred on the Resurrection, taking seriously our Sunday obligation, the world around us won't be able to squeeze us into its own mould. Rather God will continue to re-mould our minds and souls from within.

St. Paul understood this implication of the Resurrection and speaks of it repeatedly in his letters. In the Epistle for this morning from First Corinthians, the blessed Apostle calls us to get rid of the yeast of malice and wickedness. As a man with a Jewish pedigree he understood yeast as being indicative of evil and part of the old order of creation. Those who belong to the new creation of the Resurrection are to cleanse their lives of the old leaven of malice and wickedness so that we can in turn live our lives marked by the qualities of sincerity and truth.

When you choose to make the Sunday Mass the non-negotiable in your week, you can then take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. As you embrace what God does for you, you can offer yourself to him as witnesses.

Easter declares to us that we are not to become so well-adjusted to our culture that we fit into it without even thinking. Instead, as we fix our attention on God, we will be changed from the inside out.

The Church tells us that it is the Sunday Mass, where every week to celebrate the Resurrection, is key to the accomplishing of this transformation. This is why the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life and is to be at the heart of your life too.