

THEOLOGIA PRIMA

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#4 IT'S NOT REALLY ABOUT OBLIGATION

The last two articles discussed some theological and pastoral aspects of the Church's liturgical life. This week, we are briefly going to explore the nucleus of our liturgical cycle – Sunday.

Sunday is the Lord's Day, the day the Church gathers to rejoice in God's infinite love by celebrating Jesus' triumph over death and sin. Since the earliest days of Christianity, the community has gathered on Sunday to "break bread" and share stories. Justin, a second century martyr, writes in his *First Apology* that the community gathered on the "day of the sun" to share the stories of the apostles or the prophets, pray for those in need, and share in Eucharist. Justin's description of a Sunday gathering is very similar to the current pattern of our Sunday Eucharist. Justin claims they gathered on Sunday because it is the first day of the new creation. Through the resurrection of Christ, God has transformed all creation.

Because of this, many Christians have called Sunday the "eighth day of creation." The Sabbath was, among other things, a commemoration of God's resting on the seventh day when the creation was complete (The word Sabbath is related to the Hebrew Word for "seventh"). In Jesus, God's work of creation had been taken up again: with his resurrection from the dead, the Kingdom of Heaven was inaugurated, and the *remaking* of the world had begun. Because of this Christians spoke about their Sunday gatherings as taking place on the *eighth* day of the week – the new Day of God's creation, which would be completed with Christ's return in glory.

Whenever we gather to celebrate the paschal mystery, we are always participating in this eighth day of creation, but our Sunday gatherings are the fullest sign of the coming of Christ's Reign. Because every Sunday is a little Easter, it is most appropriate to celebrate sacraments such as baptism, confirmation, and even marriage in the context of the community's Sunday Eucharist. We are gathered in this eschatological moment to be made more fully into the Body of Christ with the other members of our parish, our diocese, and the whole church across time and space, and indeed all creation.

Clearly, this is a very different concept of Sunday than we get from the idea of a "Sunday Obligation." If Sunday is the day of the new creation, where would we want to be except in the midst of Christ's body?

The late Pope John Paul II wrote a beautiful discourse on the theology of Sunday, the *Apostolic Letter Dies Domini* (On keeping the Lord's Day Holy). During these Lenten days, this letter may provide some rich and nourishing words for contemplation, as we prepare to celebrate the greatest of all Sundays, Easter.

