

Fr. Roger J. Landry
Retreat at Casa Maria of the Sister Servants of the Eternal Word
Birmingham, AL
July 18-20, 2008
“Enrolling in the School of the Saints”

Sunday Mass

John Paul II, NMI 35-36

1. It is obvious that our principal attention must be given to the liturgy, "the summit towards which the Church's action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength."
2. In the twentieth century, especially since the Council, there has been a great development in the way the Christian community celebrates the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is necessary to continue in this direction, and to stress particularly the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter.
3. For two thousand years, Christian time has been measured by the memory of that "first day of the week" (Mk 16:2,9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1), when the Risen Christ gave the Apostles the gift of peace and of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23).
4. The truth of Christ's Resurrection is the original fact upon which Christian faith is based (cf. 1 Cor 15:14), an event set at the centre of the mystery of time, prefiguring the last day when Christ will return in glory.
5. Precisely by celebrating the Lord's Passover not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church will continue to show to every generation "the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world's origin and its final destiny leads".
6. I wish to insist that sharing in the Eucharist should really be the heart of Sunday for every baptized person.
 - a. It is a fundamental duty, to be fulfilled not just in order to observe a precept but as something felt as essential to a truly informed and consistent Christian life.
 - b. In many regions Christians are, or are becoming, a "little flock" (Lk 12:32). This presents them with the challenge, often in isolated and difficult situations, to bear stronger witness to the distinguishing elements of their own identity.
 - c. The duty to take part in the Eucharist every Sunday is one of these.
 - d. The Sunday Eucharist which every week gathers Christians together as God's family round the table of the Word and the Bread of Life, is also the most natural antidote to dispersion. It is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, the Lord's Day also becomes the Day of the Church,²² when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity.

Sunday

1. Jesus teaches us about the importance of Sunday, of the importance of a holy day to make us holy, a day of the Lord to reorient us to who we are and how we're supposed to live each day.
2. The Sabbath was the cause of seven major disputes between him and the Pharisees, Scribes, Herodians and Sadducees, including the one we read about in today's Gospel. It was on the basis of Jesus' teaching and healing on the Sabbath, as we just heard, that these groups first started to plot to kill Jesus. And hence, Jesus obviously thought his teaching by word and deed about the true meaning of the Sabbath against their misinterpretations was something worth dying for. It was that important for him. Why? I think ultimately because without a true understanding and living of the Sabbath, no one can truly keep the two greatest commandments and be Christ's disciples, i.e., without properly keeping holy the Lord's day, no one can truly love God, himself or herself, or others. Hence since the Sabbath is so important to Jesus, it should be just as important for us. It is fitting that during this retreat, inspired by the Holy Father, we spend some time reflecting upon just why it is so important in God's plan.
3. When we think about the centrality of Sunday in the faith, how can we not reflect on all that God has done on this day?
 - a. Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday and appeared to Mary Magdalene. He then appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, made their hearts burn when they listened to his revelation,

revealed himself to them in the Breaking of the Bread, and inspired them to go share that faith with the disciples in Jerusalem. He then visited the ten apostles in the Upper Room on the same day, and then all eleven with Thomas one week later, transformed his doubt into faith, breathed on the apostles and gave them power to forgive sins. The Holy Spirit likewise descended upon the Apostles and Mary on Pentecost Sunday, the Church was founded, and then Peter went to preach and about 3,000 received baptism.

4. When we turn to our own journey in the Christian faith, we can easily see the centrality of the Sabbath in it as well.
 - a. Probably everyone of us was baptized on the Christian Sabbath. Probably everyone of us received the Lord in Holy Communion for the first time on the Sabbath as well. We proclaim the Creed every Sunday precisely because of the link between Sunday and our baptism wherein we or others for us proclaimed this faith in words and we proclaimed it in our death and resurrection from the font.
 - b. The Christian Sabbath as well is the day par excellence of the expression of the Christian faith as a whole in the Eucharist.
 - c. While we worship and receive the same Lord at weekday Masses, there is, as the Pope says, something distinctive about Sunday Mass, because it is on Sunday that the whole Christian community comes together in faith to give thanks to God for the wonders of creation (and our creation!) and most especially for our salvation, achieved for us in the paschal mystery we share in the Eucharist.
 - d. Like God, who rested on the Sabbath in order to contemplate all of creation and pronounce it “good,” so the Christian is called on Sundays to look on all of God’s marvelous works, particularly the great gift of salvation offered him by Christ, and in similar contemplation of God’s big picture for him and the world, pronounce them good.
 - e. It is therefore for good reason that the Church from the earliest centuries has called the Sunday Eucharist, Little Easter, because it summarizes for us all of salvation history.
5. The Christian sabbath is a gift made for man to renew him in faith, but so many men and women today have lost their faith in the gift of the Sabbath.
 - a. Sunday Mass attendance is only about 25% in the States.
 - b. Of those who still attend, a large portion looks at the Sunday obligation not as a gift, but as a sort of religious “tax” on their time by a Divine IRS agent — six days for you, one day, or at least 45 minutes, for me.
 - c. For most, Sunday has become just an extension of the weekend, a day for diversion rather than conversion, time to watch athletes compete for fleeting championships rather than a time to be refreshed in one’s own marathon toward an imperishable crown.
6. The Pope stresses in NMI that Sunday Mass “is a fundamental duty, to be fulfilled not just in order to observe a precept but as something felt as essential to a truly informed and consistent Christian life.”
7. It preserves our identity as we get smaller.
8. So we need to return to the original meaning of the Sabbath when God gave Moses the third commandment.
 - a. At first it even seems like a non-sequitur: “For remember that you were too once slaves in Egypt, and the Lord, your God, brought you from there with his strong hand and outstretched arm. That is why the Lord, your God, has commanded you to observe the Sabbath.”
 - b. God ultimately gave the command of the Sabbath as a new exodus to set and keep his people free, free from all types of interior slavery, free in order to love him and love others. This is what the Scribes and Pharisees had forgotten, and why Jesus opposed them so much. They had made the Sabbath a day of slavery, hoisting unbearable burdens on the shoulders of others without lifting a finger to move them (Matt. 23:4). They used the Sabbath to oppress others, rather than set them free. They made it an end in itself — made “man for the Sabbath” — rather that saw it as a day made for man, a means to free man from the burdens of daily life.

- c. By his words and actions, Jesus brought the Sabbath back to its original meaning, inviting his followers who were weary and burdened to come to Him, who is the True Sabbath, so that he could give them rest for their bodies and their souls.
 - d. He restored the Sabbath to its ultimate purpose, to free man from slavery to his material needs, worries and most importantly his sins, so that he can put God first in his life and therefore find his true primacy and dignity with respect to social and economic life.
 - e. God gave the Sabbath to man so that man, through faith, could give himself back to God and thereby discover who he really is and the supreme destiny to which he is called.
9. This destiny to which man is called leads us to the second point: The Sabbath is a gift to renew us in love.
- a. The supreme calling of man is, in imitation of the Lord, to give of himself in love to God and to others, and the Sabbath helps us to do that. The Sabbath allows us to love God with all we've got and to love others as ourselves. How? By freeing us from most of our daily duties so that we can devote ourselves to concrete acts of love, to loving God and receiving his grace in the sacraments, by spending quality time with Him in prayer and by spending quality time loving the Lord in others, reaching out to those in need, who are elderly, or sick, or lonely, or in need of a real shot in the arm of faith, hope, or love.
10. Jesus is our model in everything, and he is our model in how to spend the Sabbath as well.
- a. When you look at how he spent the Sabbath day, we see clearly that Jesus used to go around doing good on the Sabbath, proclaiming the Good News, freeing all types of captives, and healing those in need.
 - b. His example provides an examination of conscience for us as to how we spend the Sabbath.
 - c. The sabbath is not just about us or just about our relationship with Jesus in the restricted sense. The Sabbath is also about going out to the world in peace to love and to serve the Lord, about bringing Jesus, his good news, and his healing to others.
 - d. You may reply that you don't have the gift of healing, but you'd be wrong. You may not have the gift of physical healing... yet... but, sisters, all of you, with Jesus, really do have the gift of being able to bring emotional and spiritual healing to those with withered hearts. Please don't underestimate how Jesus, through you, can touch people. A simple smile from you can change someone's whole day. A brief phone call or short letter telling someone you're thinking about them and praying for them can be a great instrument of grace. Even just your joyful presence can have an extraordinary leavening effect. And we haven't even mentioned the corporal works of mercy.
 - e. Listen to the words of the Holy Father: "From the Sunday Mass there flows a tide of charity destined to spread into the whole life of the faithful, beginning by inspiring the very way in which they live the rest of Sunday. If Sunday is a day of joy, Christians should declare by their actual behavior that we cannot be happy "on our own". They look around to find people who may need their help, who ... precisely on Sundays feel more keenly their isolation, needs and suffering." These people, whoever they are, are gifts from the Lord to help us learn how to love him, love others, and love ourselves more, and Sunday is a privileged time when we have a chance to grow in this gift of ourselves to Him and to others. Let's not bury this gift, but take advantage of it!
11. This focus on acts of love leads directly to the third point: The Christian Sabbath is a gift to renew us in hope.
- a. Our living of the Sabbath is in itself a powerful prophecy of the things for which we ultimately hope.
 - b. From the beginning, the Fathers of the Church have looked upon the prophetic character of the Christian Sabbath, which was not observed on the seventh day, as it was for the Jews, but on the eighth day. On the seventh day, Jesus, the God-man, rested, rested from all the work he had done, contemplated it and called it good — while he lay in the tomb. But on the following day, the first of the week, he rose from the dead, and, basically this changed everything.
 - c. They referred to it as the eighth day because it was day of a new creation, after the God-man had rested. The Israelites had prophesied by their observation of the Sabbath of the Lord that God is the Lord of time, of history, and of the Covenant of salvation from slavery in Egypt.

- d. They sang about the Sabbath in their psalms, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!”
 - e. What obtained for the Jews likewise obtains for the Christians, but Christ upped the ante. We are called to prophesy and proclaim by our living of the Christian Sabbath, the eighth day, that God is Lord of time, of history, of the New and Eternal Covenant freeing us from sin and for Him forever. We are called to sing “This is the Day the Lord has remade, has remade creation, has remade us. Let us rejoice and be glad in Him!”
12. Rejoice and be glad. This is what Christians are called to do on Sunday, and too few Christians really live this.
- a. Too many Christians seem begrudgingly to come to Mass, without smiles, without joys, but because they feel they “have to” be there and fear the eschatological consequences of Sunday truancy. It is not to be this way with us!
 - b. We are called to live Sundays with joy! The Holy Father spends three whole paragraphs in *Dies Domini* describing the joy that needs to be characteristic of Sundays.
 - c. Just like the apostles gathered in the upper room on that Sunday of Sundays and “rejoiced to see the Lord,” so we, too, are called to overflow with joy.
 - d. Listen again to the Holy Father: “If we wish to rediscover the full meaning of Sunday, we must rediscover this [joyful] aspect of the life of faith. Certainly, Christian joy must mark the whole of life, and not just one day of the week. But in virtue of its significance as the day of the Risen Lord, celebrating God's work of creation and "new creation", Sunday is the day of joy in a very special way, indeed the day most suitable for learning how to rejoice and to rediscover the true nature and deep roots of joy.” Sunday is the day we learn how to rejoice and rediscover the source of our joy, who is Jesus, who has conquered sin and death once and for all and has invited us to share in the spoils of this victory. Sunday, therefore, is a time for celebration, a day given by God to men and women for us to celebrate and rejoice in the greatest event of all time, which happened out of love for us.
13. Ultimately, the way we live Sunday is what we prophesy about the faith.
- a. Sunday is a gift of God to us so that we can anticipate heaven, and we should live Sunday the way we hope to live in heaven, when every tear will be wiped away, when all our needs will be left here in this valley of tears, and when we can spend eternity in the loving presence of God in heaven.
 - b. Sunday is a day on which we can put into reality our belief in the communion of saints here on earth, so that we can come together with others and worship God here in this world, in preparation, we hope, for doing so eternally in heaven.
 - c. It is also a day on which we can anticipate, with St. Therese, spending eternity doing good upon earth. If this is what we hope to do on that eternal eighth day, the eighth day that will know no evening, we can start here on earth, showering those who need it with roses and so many other acts of love.
14. The Holy Father says that “as a day of prayer, communion and joy, Sunday resounds throughout society, emanating vital energies and reasons for hope. Sunday is the proclamation that time, in which he who is the Risen Lord of history makes his home, is not the grave of our illusions but the cradle of an ever new future, an opportunity given to us to turn the fleeting moments of this life into seeds of eternity. Sunday is an invitation to look ahead; it is the day on which the Christian community cries out to Christ, “Marana tha: Come, Lord Jesus!” With this cry of hope and expectation, the Church is the companion and support of human hope. From Sunday to Sunday, enlightened by Christ, she goes forward towards the unending Sunday of the heavenly Jerusalem.”
- a. Sunday is a gift ultimately given to us by God to renew us in faith, to replenish us in love, and to refresh us in hope, until that day when we can stand astride that heavenly altar, beholding the Lamb looking as if he has been slain, and hear him say, “Come, all you blessed of my Father! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world!”

Pope Benedict

1. On several occasions he has preached on the importance of Sunday using the Abitene martyrs.
 - a. The chosen theme - "*Without Sunday we cannot live*" - takes us back to the year 304, when the Emperor Diocletian forbade Christians, on pain of death, from possessing the Scriptures, from gathering on Sundays to celebrate the Eucharist and from building places in which to hold their assemblies.
 - b. In Abitene, a small village in present-day Tunisia, 49 Christians were taken by surprise one Sunday while they were celebrating the Eucharist, gathered in the house of Octavius Felix, thereby defying the imperial prohibitions. They were arrested and taken to Carthage to be interrogated by the Proconsul Anulinus.
 - c. Significant among other things is the answer a certain Emeritus gave to the Proconsul who asked him why on earth they had disobeyed the Emperor's severe orders. He replied: "*Sine dominico non possumus*": that is, we cannot live without joining together on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. We would lack the strength to face our daily problems and not to succumb.
 - d. After atrocious tortures, these 49 martyrs of Abitene were killed. Thus, they confirmed their faith with bloodshed. They died, but they were victorious: today we remember them in the glory of the Risen Christ.
 - e. The experience of the martyrs of Abitene is also one on which we 21st-century Christians should reflect. It is not easy for us either to live as Christians, even if we are spared such prohibitions from the emperor.
2. The Sunday precept is not, therefore, an externally imposed duty, a burden on our shoulders. On the contrary, taking part in the Celebration, being nourished by the Eucharistic Bread and experiencing the communion of their brothers and sisters in Christ is a need for Christians, it is a joy; Christians can thus replenish the energy they need to continue on the journey we must make every week.
3. Christ's Resurrection happened on the first day of the week, which in the Scriptures is the day of the world's creation. For this very reason Sunday was considered by the early Christian community as the day on which the new world began, the one on which, with Christ's victory over death, the new creation began.
4. As they gathered round the Eucharistic table, the community was taking shape as a new people of God.
5. St Ignatius of Antioch described Christians as "having attained new hope" and presented them as people "who lived in accordance with Sunday" ("*iuxta dominicam viventes*").
6. In this perspective, the Bishop of Antioch wondered: "How will we be able to live without him, the One whom the prophets so long awaited?" (*Ep. ad Magnesios*, 9, 1-2).
7. "How will we be able to live without him?". In these words of St Ignatius we hear echoing the affirmation of the martyrs of Abitene: "*Sine dominico non possumus*".
8. It is this that gives rise to our prayer: that we too, Christians of today, will rediscover an awareness of the crucial importance of the Sunday Celebration and will know how to draw from participation in the Eucharist the necessary dynamism for a new commitment to proclaiming to the world Christ "*our peace*" (Eph 2: 14).
9. 72. From the beginning Christians were clearly conscious of this radical newness which the Eucharist brings to human life. The faithful immediately perceived the profound influence of the Eucharistic celebration on their manner of life. Saint Ignatius of Antioch expressed this truth when he called Christians "those who have attained a new hope," and described them as "those living in accordance with the Lord's Day" (*iuxta dominicam viventes*). (204) This phrase of the great Antiochene martyr highlights the connection between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life. The Christians' customary practice of gathering on the first day after the Sabbath to celebrate the resurrection of Christ – according to the account of Saint Justin Martyr(205) – is also what defines the form of a life renewed by an encounter with Christ.
10. Saint Ignatius' phrase – "living in accordance with the Lord's Day" – also emphasizes that this holy day becomes paradigmatic for every other day of the week. Indeed, it is defined by something more than the simple suspension of one's ordinary activities, a sort of parenthesis in one's usual daily rhythm. Christians have always experienced this day as the first day of the week, since it commemorates the radical newness

brought by Christ. Sunday is thus the day when Christians rediscover the eucharistic form which their lives are meant to have. "Living in accordance with the Lord's Day" means living in the awareness of the liberation brought by Christ and making our lives a constant self-offering to God, so that his victory may be fully revealed to all humanity through a profoundly renewed existence.

Living the Sunday obligation

1. 73. Conscious of this new vital principle which the Eucharist imparts to the Christian, the Synod Fathers reaffirmed the importance of the Sunday obligation for all the faithful, viewing it as a wellspring of authentic freedom enabling them to live each day in accordance with what they celebrated on "the Lord's Day."
2. The life of faith is endangered when we lose the desire to share in the celebration of the Eucharist and its commemoration of the paschal victory. Participating in the Sunday liturgical assembly with all our brothers and sisters, with whom we form one body in Jesus Christ, is demanded by our Christian conscience and at the same time it forms that conscience.
3. To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day to be sanctified, is symptomatic of the loss of an authentic sense of Christian freedom, the freedom of the children of God. (206)
4. Sunday thus appears as the primordial holy day, when all believers, wherever they are found, can become heralds and guardians of the true meaning of time.
5. It gives rise to the Christian meaning of life and a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life and death.
6. On the Lord's Day, then, it is fitting that Church groups should organize, around Sunday Mass, the activities of the Christian community: social gatherings, programmes for the faith formation of children, young people and adults, pilgrimages, charitable works, and different moments of prayer. For the sake of these important values – while recognizing that Saturday evening, beginning with First Vespers, is already a part of Sunday and a time when the Sunday obligation can be fulfilled – we need to remember that it is Sunday itself that is meant to be kept holy, lest it end up as a day "empty of God." (208)

The meaning of rest and of work

1. 74. Finally, it is particularly urgent nowadays to remember that the day of the Lord is also a day of rest from work. It is greatly to be hoped that this fact will also be recognized by civil society, so that individuals can be permitted to refrain from work without being penalized.
 - a. Christians, not without reference to the meaning of the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition, have seen in the Lord's Day a day of rest from their daily exertions.
 - b. This is highly significant, for it relativizes work and directs it to the person: work is for man and not man for work.
 - c. It is easy to see how this actually protects men and women, emancipating them from a possible form of enslavement.
 - d. As I have had occasion to say, "work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or to idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life." (209) It is on the day consecrated to God that men and women come to understand the meaning of their lives and also of their work. (210)
 - e. *Sine dominico non possumus?* Without the gift of the Lord, without the Lord's day, we cannot live: That was the answer given in the year 304 by Christians from Abitene in present-day Tunisia, when they were caught celebrating the forbidden Sunday Eucharist and brought before the judge.
 - f. They were asked why they were celebrating the Christian Sunday Eucharist, even though they knew it was a capital offence. "*Sine dominico non possumus*": in the word *dominicum/dominico* two meanings are inextricably intertwined, and we must once more learn to recognize their unity. First of all there is the gift of the Lord – this gift is the Lord himself: the Risen one, whom the Christians simply need to have close and accessible to them, if they are to be themselves. Yet this accessibility is not merely something spiritual, inward and subjective: the encounter with the Lord

is inscribed in time on a specific day. And so it is inscribed in our everyday, corporal and communal existence, in temporality. It gives a focus, an inner order to our time and thus to the whole of our lives. For these Christians, the Sunday Eucharist was not a commandment, but an inner necessity. Without him who sustains our lives, life itself is empty. To do without or to betray this focus would deprive life of its very foundation, would take away its inner dignity and beauty.

- g. Does this attitude of the Christians of that time apply also to us who are Christians today? Yes, it does, we too need a relationship that sustains us, that gives direction and content to our lives. We too need access to the Risen one, who sustains us through and beyond death. We need this encounter which brings us together, which gives us space for freedom, which lets us see beyond the bustle of everyday life to God's creative love, from which we come and towards which we are travelling.
- h. *Sine dominico non possumus!*" Without the Lord and without the day that belongs to him, life does not flourish. Sunday has been transformed in our Western societies into the week-end, into leisure time. Leisure time is something good and necessary, especially amid the mad rush of the modern world; each of us knows this. Yet if leisure time lacks an inner focus, an overall sense of direction, then ultimately it becomes wasted time that neither strengthens nor builds us up. Leisure time requires a focus – the encounter with him who is our origin and goal.
- i. Because Sunday is ultimately about encountering the risen Christ in word and sacrament, its span extends through the whole of reality. The early Christians celebrated the first day of the week as the Lord's day, because it was the day of the resurrection. Yet very soon, the Church also came to realize that the first day of the week is the day of the dawning of creation, the day on which God said: "Let there be light" (*Gen 1:3*).
- j. Therefore Sunday is also the Church's weekly feast of creation – the feast of thanksgiving and joy over God's creation. At a time when creation seems to be endangered in so many ways through human activity, we should consciously advert to this dimension of Sunday too. Then, for the early Church, the first day increasingly assimilated the traditional meaning of the seventh day, the Sabbath. We participate in God's rest, which embraces all of humanity. Thus we sense on this day something of the freedom and equality of all God's creatures.
2. More than just a day for Christians to come together to celebrate "Little Easter," Sunday is also a day in which we have the chance to receive the greatest of all gifts in this world, the gift of the Eucharist. What an incredible privilege this is!
- a. When I think about how much the Mass is worth, I think back to a Sudanese priest who preached the missionary cooperative my first Summer as a priest at SS. Peter & Paul Parish in Fall River. The priest was a little nervous. It was the first time he had preached to an American audience and he didn't think his English was good enough. He asked me, "Father, please help me: what should I preach to your people?" I just told him to preach about what it takes for his people to get to Mass and I promised him that the people would be generous. So he told them. He described how many of his parishioners have to walk up to 20 miles to attend Mass each Sunday, leaving in the middle of the night. They march as sitting ducks not just for bandits, but for the Muslim fundamentalist snipers, sent from Khartoum, who occasionally machine-gun them down from the roadsides. They pray the Rosary the whole time, asking our Lady to pray for them now and at the moment of their death, which they know could come at any time. After the 3-4 hour Mass, they return home, again, praying the Rosary once more as they walk the dangerous road home. Why do they go to all the effort, to risk their life, to walk so far in such dangerous territory?, the priest asked. Because his parishioners KNOW that they will meet and receive JESUS at the end of their journey. And Jesus is worth everything, including their lives, he who gave His life for them.
- b. Jesus is worth it! Thanks be to God, we live in a country in which we don't have to risk our lives to come to receive the Lord, but our freedom shouldn't decrease our love, but fill us with gratitude to God and a real hunger to use our freedom to come to worship and love him all the more. We're called to become more and more like Him whom we eat in Holy Communion!
- c. Another person who would be there would be a Cardinal I met in the Vatican. He died a couple of years ago and he was a good friend of a good friend and we met several times and he was always

kind: Cardinal Francis Xavier (our patron) Nguyen van Thuan. When Communists took over, he was imprisoned for 13 years. Stomach medicine. A few crumbs of bread and wine. The most devout Masses he celebrated. He said that whenever he celebrated Mass in freedom, he thought back to those days and said it was worth it.