

The Holy Mass – The Lord’s Day – Part 1 of 4

On August 15, 2021 the Solemnity of the Assumption, the obligation to assist (be present) at Mass in-person will be reinstated. This means that as Catholic Christians living in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia we are to be present for Holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Our absence carries with it the pain of sin. Exceptions to this obligation ordinarily consist of those obstacles posed by grave physical (illness) or moral (excess fear, anxiety etc.) factors that would make assisting at Mass difficult if not impossible. This begs the question – why is it so important to be at Mass on Sunday? Is it **“just a rule”** or more? Where do we begin?

The best place to begin is at the beginning, the very beginning. Following the six days of Creation, having completed His first labor of love on behalf of mankind (creating and bringing mankind into being) God rests on the seventh day, the Sabbath. We read in Genesis **“God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.”**¹ Following Israel’s liberation from Egypt the observance of this seventh day will be codified in the Ten Commandments: **“Remember the Sabbath day—keep it holy.”**² This day, the seventh or Sabbath, for the Jewish people is Saturday.

The observance of the seventh day is recalled particularly so that Israel may imitate God, he rested on the seventh day, and recall the mighty work of salvation the Lord wrought on their behalf; freeing them from servile labor to be a people peculiarly his own. With Jesus, we see the fulfillment of the Old Law. In Jesus, some parts of the law are fulfilled, as in completed and done, others parts are fulfilled in that they are perfected. In Jesus, the definitive Lord’s Day, is Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord wherein Jesus conquers sin and death opens the way to heaven for all who believe in Him.

Pope Innocent I, writing at the beginning of the fifth century testifies to the custom of gathering on Sunday: **“We celebrate Sunday because of the venerable Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we do so not only at Easter but also at the turning of the week.”**³ The center point of these observance of this day for Christians, particularly Catholic, is the celebration of the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist, the saving sacrifice of Jesus is re-presented, made present again, and those persons believing in him are permitted to taste the fruits of the tree of life, the cross, in the reception of his very body and blood, under the forms of bread and wine. In ancient times, as now, it was a defining characteristic of the Christian people to refrain from servile labor on Sunday and gather for the **“breaking of the bread.”** Sharing in the one sacrifice of Christ the Christian people are made one.

Christians fully become the Body of Christ by sharing in the Body of Christ, the Eucharist. Christ is the head and we are the members. Separated from our head, by sin or our own negligence, we are not much different than a limb cut off from a perfectly healthy body; more dead than alive. By Baptism, we are made for communion. Observing the Lord’s Day fulfills this desire and duty of a grateful heart.

~ Rev. Matthew Biedrzycki, Parochial Vicar, Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, Philadelphia

¹ Gen 2:3

² Ex 20:11

³ Cited from John Paul II, *Dies Domini, Apostolic Letter on Keeping Holy the Lord’s Day*, 11