

The Sunday Celebration

By Sr. Ann Rehrauer

My favorite of Pope John Paul II's encyclicals is *Dies Domini* — "The Day of the Lord," issued in 1998. The letter caught my attention because it is well written and addresses a liturgical topic. But beyond that, it makes me re-evaluate the way I celebrate (or sometimes fail to celebrate) Sunday.

Like most Americans, my time consciousness is divided into the "work week" and "the weekend," even though sometimes those two realities overlap. The weekend is an opportunity to get caught up on "home things" like laundry and yard work, to visit relatives at a distance, or most often for me, time in the office without the interruption of phone calls and meetings so I can get some real work accomplished.

As I read and reread the Holy Father's letter I realize that sometimes I treat Sunday as just part of "the weekend," which denotes flexible time, and not as "The Lord's Day." Even my celebration of Sunday Mass is often on Saturday afternoon and "other things" happen on Sunday. Yet Sunday, the first day of the week for Christians, is unique for us. It's the fundamental feast day and the heart of Christian life, because it is the day of Christ's resurrection and the dawn of a new creation. Each year at Easter, and each week on Sunday, we commemorate Jesus' victory over sin and death.

For many of us, Sunday in former years was special. Sunday Mass was on Sunday morning because we didn't have a Saturday evening anticipated liturgy. Mass was often followed by a special breakfast or Sunday dinner when the entire family gathered at table to spend time and enjoy each other. We didn't shop on Sunday because stores weren't open. Businesses closed down so workers could be home with their families and only essential services were open. There were activities at the parish — cake walks and bake sales, card parties, Scout meetings, corporate Communion breakfasts and Sunday vespers. It was also a time for a road trip to visit the grandparents. Life has changed, and cultural shifts and economic changes will not allow a return to "bygone days." But with intention and effort — we can recover a sense of the Lord's Day and, as Christians, celebrate it differently.

Sunday is also a day of rest and respite. God's "rest" after the work of creation was not to recoup energy, but to gaze on the goodness of all that he had made. Respite or contemplative time allows us to see with new eyes and to afford us the luxury of "wasting time" with God. We "keep holy" the Lord's Day by remembering and acknowledging that "the world and all it holds" (including us) belongs to God. Relationships, including our relationship with God, take time.

The heart of Sunday is the eucharistic assembly — where the church gathers to become more of what she already is. We celebrate the living presence of Christ among us, we profess faith in his resurrection, we receive the gift he has promised, and we look forward to that final day of the Lord when Christ will return. With shortages of priests, people have suggested that the "Sunday obligation" be moved to some other day of the week. Celebrating the Eucharist on Sunday is not simply an obligation but a reminder, a witness and an experience of who we are and whose we are. Perhaps this Sunday you and I can pause, reflect and do even one thing differently to celebrate that this first day of the week, the eighth day of creation, this time to gather as church, is truly "The Lord's Day."