



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARD. FRANCIS ARINZE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE STUDY DAY IN HONOUR
OF THE 43rd ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROMULGATION
OF THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY,
SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM**

*To My Venerable Brother,
Cardinal Francis Arinze,
Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship
and the Discipline of the Sacraments*

I am pleased to offer my cordial greeting to you and to those taking part in the Study Day organized by this Dicastery on the anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. After reflecting in the past on the Roman Martyrology and on Sacred Music, you are now preparing to examine in depth the theme: "*Sunday Mass for the sanctification of the Christian People*". Because of its spiritual and pastoral implications, this is a very timely topic.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that "the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery every seventh day, which day is appropriately called the "Lord's Day' or "Sunday" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 106).

Sunday remains the fertile foundation and at the same time the fundamental nucleus of the liturgical year which originated in Christ's Resurrection, thanks to which the features of eternity were impressed on time.

Thus, Sunday is, so to speak, a fragment of time imbued with eternity, for its dawn saw the Crucified and Risen Christ enter victorious into eternal life.

With the event of the Resurrection, creation and redemption reach their fulfilment. On the "first day after Saturday", the women and then the Disciples, meeting the Risen One, understood that this was "the day which the Lord has made" (Ps 118[117]: 24), "his" day, the *Dies Domini*. In fact, this is what the liturgy sings: "O first and last day, radiant and shining with Christ's triumph".

From the very outset, this has been a stable element in the perception of the mystery of Sunday: "The Word", Origen affirms, "has moved the feast of the Sabbath to the day on which the light was produced and has given us as an image of true repose, Sunday, the day of salvation, the first day of the light in which the Saviour of the world, after completing all his work with men and after conquering death, crossed the threshold of Heaven, surpassing the creation of the six days and receiving the blessed Sabbath and rest in God" (*Comment on Psalm 91*).

Inspired by knowledge of this, St Ignatius of Antioch asserted: "We are no longer keeping the Sabbath, but the Lord's Day" (*Ad Magn. 9, 1*).

For the first Christians, participation in the Sunday celebrations was the natural expression of their belonging to Christ, of communion with his Mystical Body, in the joyful expectation of his glorious return.

This belonging was expressed heroically in what happened to the martyrs of Abitene, who faced death exclaiming, "*Sine dominico non possumus*": without gathering together on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist, we cannot live.

How much more necessary it is today to reaffirm the sacredness of the Lord's Day and the need to take part in Sunday Mass!

The cultural context in which we live, often marked by religious indifference and secularism that blot out the horizon of the transcendent, must not let us forget that the People of God, born from "Christ's Passover, Sunday", should return to it as to an inexhaustible source, in order to understand better and better the features of their own identity and the reasons for their existence.

The Second Vatican Council, after pointing out the origin of Sunday, continued: "On this day Christ's faithful are bound to come together into one place. They should listen to the Word of God and take part in the Eucharist, thus calling to mind the Passion, Resurrection and Glory of the Lord Jesus and giving thanks to God who "has begotten them again, through the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, unto a living hope" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 106).

Sunday was not chosen by the Christian community but by the Apostles, and indeed by Christ himself, who on that day, "the first day of the week", rose and appeared to the disciples (cf. Mt 28: 1; Mk 16: 9; Lk 24: 1; Jn 20: 1, 19; Acts 20: 7; I Cor 16: 2), and appeared to them again "eight days later" (Jn 20: 26).

Sunday is the day on which the Risen Lord makes himself present among his followers, invites them to his banquet and shares himself with them so that they too, united and configured to him, may worship God properly.

Therefore, as I encourage people to give ever greater importance to the "Lord's Day", I am eager to highlight the central place of the Eucharist as a fundamental pillar of Sunday and of all ecclesial life.

Indeed, at every Sunday Eucharistic celebration, the sanctification of the Christian people takes place as it will take place until the Sunday that never sets, the day of the definitive encounter of God with his creatures.

In this perspective, I express the hope that the Study Day promoted by this Dicastery on such a timely theme will contribute to the recovery of the Christian meaning of Sunday in the context of pastoral care and in every believer's life.

May the "Day of the Lord" that could well be called "the lord of days" regain all its importance and be perceived and lived to the full in the celebration of the Eucharist, from which the Christian community grows authentically and on which it depends (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 6).

As I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and invoke upon each one the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Venerable Brother, to your collaborators and to all the participants in this important meeting.

From the Vatican, 27 November 2006

BENEDICT XVI

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