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The Second Sunday of the Year (C)

The poinsettias are gone; the trees and wreaths have been removed; even the Nativity scene is absent. After our fifteen-day celebration of Christmas, we find ourselves in this church that now seems somehow very empty. Sometimes it seems empty that way within us, too.

We look around at the emptiness and we ask: "Where do I go from here? What do I do now?" What do we do now that the Christmas season has ended?

With these thoughts swirling within us, we return to this season of "Ordinary Time." It is a graced time, really. The celebrations that so often required so much of our attention now give way to a quieter, more reflective time.

Ordinary Time is a time in which we are to unfold within our hearts and lives the great mysteries of Christ Jesus.

The season of Ordinary Time is centered not on a particular event or moment of salvation history, but on Sunday itself. With the recent festivities now ended, we focus now upon the Eucharist, we focus upon that which makes this day so important as we hear the words of Mary: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). "Do this in memory of me," he says, and so have we done these past two thousand years (Luke 22:19).

For twenty centuries the Christian community has gathered on this day to devote "themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). We gather to hear the Good News of Victory:

No more shall people call you 'Forsaken,' or your land 'Desolate,' but you shall be called 'My Delight,' and your land 'Espoused.' For the LORD delights in you and makes your land his spouse. As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you (Isaiah 62:).

The Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, assembles on Sunday - the Lord's Day - to partake in the magnificent "wedding feast of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9).

We are able to come together for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass rather easily. We certainly have our distractions: television, the Internet, sports, homework, family struggles, difficulties at work, troublesome weather, even a homecoming dance. All of these things - some good and some bad - vie for our attention and loyalty. The challenge of the Christian is to remain focused on and loyal to Christ Jesus above all else, to "worship the LORD in holy attire" (Psalm 96:9).

The Christians of the first few centuries knew well the tremendous difficulties of following Christ. They endured persecution and faced death, all because they listened to the words of the Psalmist: "Tremble before [the LORD], all the earth;

say among the nations: the LORD is king" (Psalm 96:9-10). These Christians faced much greater difficulties than we do, and perhaps because of them their faith shone out all the more.

In the year 304 forty-nine Christians of the village of Abitene were arrested during the celebration of the Mass and brought before the Proconsul Anulinus in Carthage to face charges of disobeying imperial decrees. One of their number, Emeritus by name, responded to the charges simply: *Sine dominico non possumus*, "We cannot live without Sunday." These Christians were then tortured in a most barbarous fashion and then executed, all because they refused to give up the Eucharist, all because they insisted on keeping holy the Lord's Day (cf. Exodus 20:8). I wonder what our response would be if someone prevented us from partaking in the Holy Mass, of receiving the precious Body and Blood of the Lord on Sunday. Would we miss it? Would we care at all? The answer lies in our love of the Lord.

I said earlier that Ordinary Time is given to us so that we might unfold and reflect further upon the mysteries of Christ. We know that, as Pope Benedict reminds us,

In taking flesh, the Son of God could become Bread and thus be the nourishment of his people, of us, journeying on in this world towards the promised land of Heaven. We need this Bread to face the fatigue and weariness of the journey. Sunday, the Lord's Day, is a favorable opportunity to draw strength from him, the Lord of life.¹

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, [Homily at the 24th Italian National Eucharistic Congress](#), Bari, Italy, 29 May 2005.

We gather together for the Sunday Mass, then, to receive our strength and sustenance to continue our earthly pilgrimage to heaven. The Eucharist is our way bread, our bread for the journey. It is that without which we cannot live. This is why the Abitene martyrs cried out: "We cannot live without Sunday!"

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.²

If the Sunday Mass is to be a joy we must prepare ourselves for it. We would do well to read the Scripture readings at home before we come so as not to hear them for the first time. We ought to arrive with enough time to spend quietly talking with the Lord, offering him the needs of the week and our love. We ought to dress fittingly, conscious that this is the wedding feast of the Lord (cf. Matthew 22:1-14).

The Holy Father has called us to "rediscover the joy of Christian Sundays. We must proudly rediscover the privilege of sharing in the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of the renewed world."³ Let this be our goal from now until the beginning of Lent: let us rediscover the beauty of Sunday devoted entirely to the Lord, a day without work, shopping or chores, a day given to

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

the Lord, spiritual reading, family and friends. "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."⁴ May we, too, cry out: We cannot live without Sunday! Amen!

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, [Letter to Cardinal Arinze](#), 27 November 2006.