

## “Year of the Eucharist” - The Sabbath Day—by Fr. Steve Lape

A while ago, I spoke with a Christian man of another denomination about various Bible teachings. The man suggested that we as Catholics were wrong to switch the Sabbath Day that God had ordained to be from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, which is what the Jews still observe today. He felt it was arrogant of us to change what God had first designated. So, what happened? Why do Catholics and most Christians recognize Sunday instead of Saturday as our Sabbath Day? Recall that one of God’s 10 Commandments states: “Remember to keep the Sabbath Day holy.” For Catholics, that is the 3rd Commandment.

In the Book of Genesis, we find: “Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. Since on the 7th day God was finished with the work He had been doing, He rested on the 7th day from all the work He had undertaken. So God blessed the 7th day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work He had done in creation.” (2:1-3). As



Saturday has been recognized as the 7th or last day of the week, that has been considered, by the Jews, to be the Sabbath, the day for resting from work and worshipping God. As most of the first Christians were Jewish (as Jesus and his disciples were), it’s understandable that they would acknowledge Saturday as Sabbath Day. However, because of Jesus’ rising from the dead on that first Easter Sunday, the first day of the week, early Christians recognized the importance of remembering Jesus Christ on Sundays. The New Testament alludes to this shift in emphasis in a couple of verses. Consider Mark 16:1-2—“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.

Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb,” Later, in verse 9, it reads: “When He had risen, early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene...She went and told His companions who were mourning and weeping.” So, with their encountering the Risen Lord on a Sunday, Christians celebrate this victory over death on this special day of each week, as indicated in Acts 20:7 -”On the first day of the week when we gathered to bread bread...” Under the New American Bible footnote for this verse, it says that this “first day of the Jewish week” was “apparently chosen originally by the Jerusalem community for the celebration of the liturgy of the Eucharist in order to relate it to the resurrection of Christ.” This is how disciples, then and now, fulfill what Jesus asked His followers to do, when

He told his Apostles at the Last Supper, “Do this in remembrance of me. (Luke 22:19). The importance of this gathering is alluded to in the letter to the Hebrews: “We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another...” (10:25)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church echoes this importance with this entry: “The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life. ‘Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery (the suffering, dying and rising of Jesus Christ) is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church.’ (#2177). Thus, our presence at Sunday Mass is a gift of thanksgiving to God and a gift of inspiration to other believers who gather to reflect on the saving joy and loving power that God shares with us through Word and Sacrament. Everything else should take a back seat in priority on Sundays.