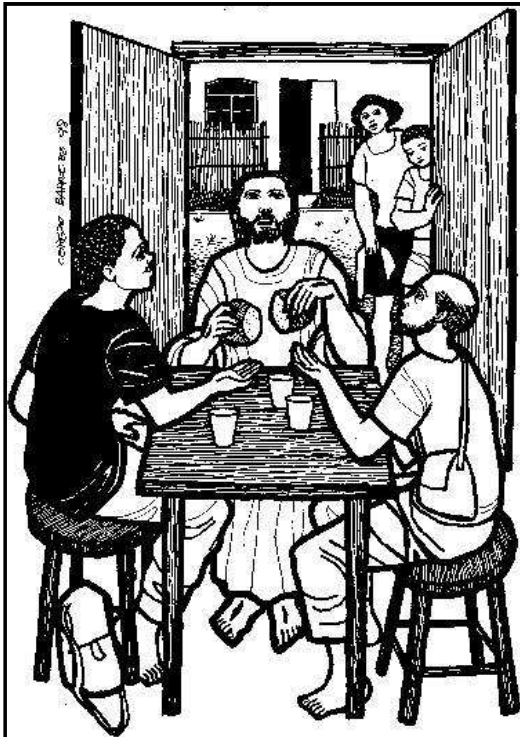


# SUNDAY:

*The heart of the Liturgical Year.*



What is the most important day in the Christian Calendar?

**SUNDAY:** Like the Jewish Calendar we celebrate a weekly cycle of prayer and worship. Historically it is the first, the original Christian festival.

*The Jewish Community celebrates on Shabbat  
Why Do Christians celebrate Sunday?*

## 1. Sunday as Sabbath

Many people still think of Sunday as Sabbath

*Thou shalt keep the Sabbath day holy*

and connect with that idea is a whole lot of dos and don'ts. Don't work, don't play, don't enjoy!

This view of Sunday as Sabbath is not healthy—nor holy

*The idea of Sunday as Sabbath only began to develop in the Sixth Century. Over time it began to develop a legalistic understanding of Sunday as an obligation or duty rather than as a pathway of the Spirit.*

A lot depends on how you understand SABBATH.

Two sets of Images link the Sabbath firstly, with the CREATION story and secondly with the EXODUS.

**The story of Creation** associates the rhythm of our work and rest with the creative activity of God and God's delight in creation. Work leads to rest, rather than rest being for the sake of work. In resting from work we imitate and honour God who also rested, by seeking to live by this godly pattern. It is a liberating thing to acknowledge that life is far more than work: it is to be **enjoyed!** The Church needs to resist seeing Sunday in terms of duty or definable obligations. It is not about 'oughts' but about celebrating God's gift of rest and praise

Sunday was also seen as a way of celebrating God's vision of Time – Kairos not Chronos Time. Sunday was primarily a day to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus—the new Creation, the new age which Jesus inaugurated through his death and resurrection and the **new Exodus** from sin and death to forgiveness and new life in God. Sunday was a day for WORSHIP. It was NEVER simply a day for abstaining from work. In the early centuries Christians had to fit worship into their working life—there was not day off! The whole of life, all seven days of the week were to be used to honour God in the way people lived and worked.

## 2. Sunday as day of Resurrection

In apostolic times Christians began to meet together on the **first** day of the week rather than on the Sabbath. Whether they continued to attend the Sabbath synagogue or not, it was the SUNDAY assembly that came to identify them. It is likely that the early Christian church met on Sunday Evening. Why? Maybe it has something to do with the fact that, in Luke and John, the encounters of the disciples with the risen Lord occurred on the evening of the first day of the week. What is also important is that in both Luke and John, Jesus appears to them in the context of a common meal. Sunday became the day when the disciples celebrated the resurrection of Jesus,

This day was not a commemoration, a simple remembrance of an historical event. Sunday was a weekly eschatological encounter with the risen Lord who met them in the reading and preaching of the scriptures and in the Eucharist.

### Other names for Sunday

The Lord's Day, the first day of the week, the eighth day, the day of resurrection...

**1. The first day** of creation light was created and God rolled back the darkness. Now in Christ God has once again undertaken a new work of creation, and in the resurrection of Jesus is shown to be victorious over darkness...

*On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread. Acts 20: 7*

**2. The Lord's Day** – *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day..." Rev. 1:10*

This term has commonly been identified with the Christian observance of the first day of the week.

The Didache makes reference to Christians assembling on the Lord's Day to break bread and give thanks (*Didache* 14:1).

### 3. The Eighth day

In a seven day week, how can there be an eighth day?

*"Eight days later, the disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them..." - John 20:26*

This is a poetic way of speaking which evokes an image of God transcending the ordinary and making life new.

On Sunday we enter into this time, where God is acting to make us new, and draw us into a life that extends beyond what we see and touch.

**In AD 321** Constantine made Sunday a public holiday.

*"The day of the Lord, the day of the Resurrection, the day of the Christians is our day. And if it is called the day of the Sun by the pagans, we willingly accept this name. For on this day arose the light, on this day shone forth the sun of justice"*

*St. Jerome:*

The early church saw the weekly liturgical commemoration of Sunday as "...the cosmic day of creation, the biblical day of circumcision, the evangelical day of the Resurrection, the Church's day of the Eucharistic celebration, and finally, the eschatological day of the age to come"

### The Lord's Day and the rest of the Week

The First day of the week sets the tone for the rest of the week.

### Daily Prayer

Paul Bradshaw in his book *Daily Prayer in the Early Church*, argues convincingly that the early church adapted times and patterns of Jewish prayer throughout the week.

In Acts we hear about the apostolic community meeting regularly together for prayer. This was a corporate act of the church – a practice which the church urgently needs to recover - we simply leave too much up to the individual - We assume people know how to pray and fail to fully form people for the spiritual life.

The Didache calls upon the Christian community to say the Lord's Prayer three times a day. It's highly unlikely that this was the only prayer used by the early Church as we have many indications in the NT of prayers of thanksgiving and intercession. It is also highly likely that reciting the psalms and reading scripture was also part of the common prayer of the apostolic community as well as Christian hymns. There are so many wonderful canticles in the Gospels and NT letters to give us an indication of the place of hymns in Christian worship.

*The Magnificat,  
The Canticle of Zechariah,  
the Nunc Dimittus,*

*Luke's Gospel*

*The Canticle to the Lamb,  
The Canticle of the Redeemed*

*The Apocalypse*

Paul Bradshaw in another book, *Two ways of Praying*, shows how the life of daily prayer developed as the centuries passed into a Cathedral Office and a Monastic Office.

### **The Cathedral Office -**

observed morning and evening with singing, procession, incense, psalmody, reading, instruction, vestments.

**The Monastic Office** – was for those who could not attend corporate prayer but remained at home or in their monastic cell where while they were physically separated from the community of faith, they joined them in Christ by praying at the same time.

The so called 'Armenian Lectionary' is thought to have been based on a daily lection of readings used in the church of Jerusalem in the fourth Century. What that shows us is that the Christian Community had a disciplined life of corporate prayer and reading.

### **Fasting**

Alongside daily prayer the early church appears to have adapted the Jewish pattern of fasting, but changed the days.

In the Jewish community **Monday** and **Thursday** were traditional days of Fasting. Once again the Didache shows that in the Christian Community it was changed to **Wednesday** and **Friday**. ‘

*Your fasts should not coincide with those of the hypocrites.*

*They fast Mondays and Fridays; you should fast of*

*Wednesdays and Fridays’*

Didache 8:1

**Friday** was important as it was the day of Jesus' death.

**Saturday** was a time of quiet, prayerful preparation for the Sunday feast as it was the day Jesus was in the tomb.

**Wednesday** was often set aside as the mid-point in the week,

a way of ensuring that the busyness of everyday life was punctuated by some physical religious act that lead people to keep the presence of God before them.

### **Reading:**

Receiving the Day Dorothy Bass

‘*Sunday: The Heart of the Liturgical Year*’, Mark Searle  
in Between Memory and Hope, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson

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