



SYRO MALABAR EPARCHY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Pastoral Letter 18

12/07/2023

Relying on God's grace and protection, I, Joseph Srampickal, Bishop of Catholic Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain, write to all Priests, Deacons, Religious and all the Faithful.

The goal of Sunday observance: The second coming of Christ

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the first year of the second pastoral plan of our Eparchy, we have taken Liturgy as the subject matter of our study. The fundamental basis of the Liturgy is Sunday, the day of the Lord. The Church is continually engaged in the process of preparing the community of the faithful for the day of the Lord.

From the time of the Apostles, Sunday has been celebrated as a Holy day. Since Sunday was a holiday in almost all parts of the world, the Sunday observance was very easy. It prepared an opportunity for the faithful to enjoy the experience of holy rest. It helped them to find time for activities rooted in spirituality. It also helped to deepen personal relationships, to grow in love and to strengthen family relationships. Many people have utilised Sunday to visit and comfort sick and old people and to have friendly talks with them. Thus, Sunday observance was helpful to develop as a community growing in love towards God and man.

But in today's changed circumstances the sanctity of Sunday observance has been blurred and changes have happened to its nature. The natural tendency to consider Sunday as the weekend has become a part of the modern culture. As the weekend denotes entertainment and relaxation, the Christian maturity helps us to consider Sunday as the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, the Lord's Day and Holy day, as Saint Pope John Paul teaches us (Lord's Day 4).

God Himself, who took rest on the seventh day having completed the creation in six days, is the model to us for Sabbath rest. God was so happy looking at His creation, finding it good. Here we see a God who is joyful looking at His creation, especially at man who is the crown of creation. God's rest on the seventh day was His delight in looking at man created in His own image. For man the rest should be that of being joyful by turning to and looking at God. The essence of Sunday rest should be an experience of joy by giving praises, thanks and worship to God through remembering and reflecting on the salvific events (remission of sin, membership in the Kingdom of God and eternal

life) which were fulfilled in Christ the Saviour. Sunday has become a Holy day because it was blessed by God and made holy by Him and set apart from other days to be the Lord's Day (Lord's Day 14).

All the days and all times belong to God and so they are holy. All throughout human life, man should praise God and give thanks to Him specially remembering God's act of creation, protection and salvation. Though such relationship of man and God is to continue always, the times of explicit prayer are the moments of intensity and happiness of this relationship Sunday, the Lord's Day, should be considered as the time *par excellence* of this relationship (Lord's Day 15).

The Vatican Council II asks all the Christian faithful to gather together on Sundays to recollect the passion, resurrection and glory of our Lord and to give thanks to God who has given us a new birth to vital hope through his resurrection, by listening to the Word of God and participating in the Holy Qurbana (Liturgy 106). The goal of the Sunday observance is the glorious second coming of Christ from Heaven.

God, who commanded us to observe the Sabbath rest, also commanded us to remember what he had done for the liberation of His people. "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." (Deut. 5:15). We enter into the depth of God's rest and partake in the joy of God when we observe the Lord's Day by praising God gratefully remembering God's actions for the salvation of man (Lord's Day 17). It is only then the Sunday rest will have a value which is holy and becomes meaningful.

If the Exodus event was the liberation of Israel, its perfect revelation is in the death and resurrection of Christ. Through that the entire humanity becomes liberated from sin, death, Satan and the world. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the resurrection is the fulfilment of creation. The joy that God had in the act of creation is being fulfilled in Christ through resurrection. That is the importance of Sunday observance. The main theme of Sunday observance is the remembrance and celebration of the resurrection which is the salvific event that led the entire of humanity to the freedom of being the children of God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that the Lord's Day observance on Sundays and the celebration of the Holy Qurbana exist at the core place of the life of the Church (2177).

During the Sunday Qurbana, we have the same experience that the disciples had when they saw Jesus, the experience they had on the Easter Sunday evening. St Augustine attributes Sunday as 'the Sacrament of Easter'. Jesus affirmed the disciples in the resurrection, by appearing to them also on Sunday, the eighth day of His resurrection. This appearance of Jesus can be considered as the basis of the habit of the Christian community gathering together and celebrating Holy Qurbana on each eighth day observing it as the Day of the Lord. The experience of the two disciples going to Emmaus manifests the relationship between the appearance of Jesus and Holy Qurbana. When Jesus took the bread, blessed it, divided and gave it to them, they identified Him (Lk 24:30). Let us try to be with the Church by actively participating in Sunday

observance without causing any dimness to its sanctity and importance and by comprehending the truth that “among the many activities of a parish none is as vital or as community-forming as the Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and His Eucharist” (Lord’s Day 35). The Church calls Sunday which is the symbol of eternity as the 8th Day. Our life of faith is a pilgrimage that is going forwards with the Church through Sunday observance. The ultimate aim of this pilgrimage is Heaven. Sunday observance provides a foretaste of Heaven. The heavenly life is a Sunday experience which is the final as well as unending Sunday. It is the eternity of the resurrection experience. Let that be the matter of our reflection every day.

I surrender each and every one of you to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, the Church, and each one of us, St Joseph, the head of the Holy Family and protector of the Church, St Thomas, the Father of our faith and St Alphonsa of Immaculate Conception, the Patroness of our Eparchy.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Love of God the Father and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Yours in our Lord and our God,

+ Joseph Srampickal

Bishop Joseph Srampickal
Catholic Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain

NB: This Pastoral letter must be read in all the Parishes/Missions/Proposed Missions of the Eparchy during the celebration of the Holy Qurbana on Sunday the 16th of July 2023 (or the nearest Sunday when Holy Qurbana is celebrated, if there is no Holy Qurbana celebrated on the 16th of July 2023).