



Guidelines for Sunday Celebration of the Word (when Sunday Eucharist is unavailable)

Theological Considerations.

A. The Importance of Sunday for Christians.

1. Church history teaches us that from the very beginning Christians gathered together on Sunday.ⁱ
2. Sunday is the first “Holy Day” or feast of the Church. It was above all on “the first day of the week”, Sunday, the Day of the Lord, the day of Jesus’ resurrection, that the Christians met “to break bread” (Acts 20:7) . From that time on down to our own day, the celebration of Eucharist has been continued so that today we encounter it everywhere in the Church with the same fundamental structure. It remains the centre of the Church’s life.ⁱⁱ
3. Sunday itself is a symbol. Sunday celebration by Christians is not just a transferral of the Jewish Sabbath to another day. It is the sacrament of the Risen Lord: it is the day of Resurrection, of the Risen One’s appearance and of the Spirit’s coming. At the same time it is a sacrament of the Church because Sunday is when the Church is formed afresh as the Body of Christ united with its Head. It is the tradition of the church that Sunday, the Assembly and Eucharist are inseparable.
4. Sunday also reminds the faithful of their baptism.

B. The Importance of Eucharist.

5. In the context of these Guidelines, “Eucharist” refers to the Paschal celebration traditionally referred to as “the Mass.” “The liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist together form ‘one

single act of worship’ⁱⁱⁱ; the Eucharistic table set for us is the table both of the Word of God and the Body of the Lord.”^{iv}

6. “The Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.”^v Eucharist is at the heart of Catholic liturgy; it is this celebration which takes central place in our worship of God where we are in union with Christ the source of our life and unity. As the People of God we gather on the Lord’s Day, Sunday, to celebrate not as individuals but as a whole faith community.
7. “The precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass.” “The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic Rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day.”^{vi}

“Sacred celebration of the Word of God ... is particularly to be commended in places where no priest is available; when this is so, a deacon or some other person authorised by the bishop, should preside over the celebration.”^{vii}

8. “Participation in the communal celebration of Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity.”^{viii}

C. The Importance of the Assembly.

9. The gathering of God's people (assembly) is important in itself. "[Christ] is always present in a body of the faithful gathered in his name (cf. Mt 18:20). He is present, too, in his Word, for it is he who speaks when the Scriptures are read in the Church. In the sacrifice of the Eucharist he is present both in the person of the minister.... and above all under the species of the Eucharist."^{ix}
10. Each community which gathers to hear God's word is truly Church and Christ is always and really present in it.^x The community possesses a common faith and a unity that emerges from diversity. Through the diocesan bishop, the local assembly is in communion with the universal Church. In this way, those assembled in Christ's name form the Church in that place and witness to its presence.^{xi}
11. The assembly celebrates the Lord's Day not only because it is vitally important for personal faith, but because it is necessary for the faith of the Church, a need experienced and a tradition maintained since the first Easter. "Indeed, any celebration of Sunday is always a celebration of the Lord's Paschal Mystery, in which the whole Church dies with Christ, is buried, and rises with him."^{xii}
12. It is the whole assembly, the faithful and their pastors (all of whom are priestly people through the right and responsibility of their Baptism), who unite with Christ to offer the Paschal sacrifice. "The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, ... they should take part in the sacred service conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full involvement. ... by offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves as well..."^{xiii}

D. Sunday Celebrations of the Word: some implications.

13. "If because of a lack of a sacred minister or for other grave cause, participation in the celebration of (Sunday) Eucharist is impossible, it is specially recommended that the faithful take part in a Liturgy of the Word ... celebrated in the parish church or in another sacred place according to the prescriptions of the diocesan bishop."^{xiv}

It is the assembly, united and led by Christ, that celebrates the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays when no ordained member is able to be present.

14. The Liturgy of the Word deserves recognition

as a liturgical celebration in its own right. An uncritical acceptance of the custom of always having a Communion Service with the Sunday celebration of the Liturgy of the Word may obscure the full Catholic understanding of the Eucharist and the centrality of the Mass. Effective Eucharistic catechesis in this regard is essential. The celebration of the Liturgy of the Word without Communion from time to time may also reduce the risk of confusion.

15. These liturgical celebrations are to be conducted in accordance with the Canadian Ritual Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours and any Archdiocesan directives that may be issued.
 - 15.1 Any such Sunday Liturgy of the Word, is to be regarded as a Gathering in the expectation of the Eucharist. It may be accompanied by a communion service.
 - 15.2 Where communion is distributed, the consecrated hosts are to be brought from a Eucharist celebrated in the parish or a neighbouring parish of the region.
 - a) Ideally this Eucharist should have been celebrated on the same day as the Sunday celebration of the Word is to take place.
 - b) Alternatively, the Parish Priest can leave consecrated hosts from an earlier Eucharist, recently celebrated in the community.
 - c) The connection between the receiving of communion and the celebration of Eucharist from which communion proceeds should be explicitly acknowledged.
 - d) Any such Sunday Liturgy of the Word is to include some prayer for an increase in vocations to the ordained priesthood.^{xv}

E. Sunday: Some Practical Considerations.

16. *Liturgical roles.* In the Sunday celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, there is a variety of liturgical roles and a number of people need to be involved; the foremost of these is the Presider who presides over the celebration and calls the people to prayer. The principle is that no one person should exercise more than one role at such a liturgy.

"... the important liturgical ministries of hospitality, proclaiming the Word, cantor,

choir and music leader, communion, acolyte, environment etc are still needed. ... Some will be called to new ministries: the co-ordination of other ministries, leadership of the liturgical assembly and preaching God's Word."^{xvi}

Homily / Reflection. A person authorised by the Bishop and/or the Parish Priest may give a reflection on the Scriptures of the day. If no one is authorised, another person, but not the one who read from the Scriptures, may read a homily prepared by the Parish Priest or the diocese.^{xvii}

17. *Venue.* A Sunday celebration of the Liturgy of the Word should not be held in a place where Eucharist has been celebrated for the same Sunday.^{xviii}
18. 19. *Decision-making.* It is for the Parish Priest, in consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council and parishioners generally, to decide whether a Sunday Liturgy of the Word is to be held.

F. Local Considerations for Celebrating Sunday Eucharist.

19. Every effort is to be made to ensure that Mass is celebrated every weekend (Saturday Vigil or Sunday), in every Parish of the Archdiocese.
20. To facilitate the weekly provision of Sunday Mass in every Parish, it may be necessary to rationalise the arrangements for the celebration of Sunday Eucharist within the regional grouping of parishes. This could mean a reduction in the number of occasions Sunday Eucharist is celebrated within a particular parish.
21. It remains the ideal to celebrate Eucharist every Sunday in all Mass Centres where there is continuing community support. However, where all the Mass Centres within a Parish or Region cannot be provided with a weekly celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, it will be necessary to reduce the celebration of Sunday Eucharist to a fortnightly or at least a monthly basis in some Mass Centres.
22. Where priests are asked to "supply" for Sunday Eucharist in parishes without a resident priest, they should be asked to do so on a regular basis so that they may develop personal and pastoral links with the local parish community.
23. It is important to avoid placing unreal or unfair expectations on the priests and due consideration must be given to their physical and spiritual health. Consequently:

23.1 No Priest is to celebrate Sunday Eucharist on more than three occasions on regular basis on a weekend.

23.2 The timing of Sunday Masses is to be such as to allow sufficient time for the Priest to travel between venues and where possible to spend time with the local community.

24. Adequate training is to be provided to all those involved in the celebration of Liturgies of the Word or Hours.

G. Participating in the Sunday Celebration.

25. A moral dilemma may arise when there is a choice between participating in the local community's Sunday celebration of the Liturgy of the Word without a priest, and travelling to another parish or place to participate in the celebration of Eucharist.

25.1 In making their decision the faithful should prayerfully take into account a number of factors. Each one's conscientious decision is to be respected by others.

25.2 The principal factors to be considered are:

- a) The fundamental Christian duty of observing Sunday as the Lord's day, especially through communal worship.
- b) The Church's serious precept of participating in the Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.
- c) The need of the local community to share regularly in a form of public worship in order to preserve and develop its Catholic identity, sense of belonging and vitality of mission.
- d) Moral considerations that may modify or excuse from the observance of that precept (for example, the distance to travel,^{xix} age and health, work requirements, responsibilities for the welfare of others, care of the sick etc), or for the legitimate needs of the community.

H. Leaders of the Assembly.

26. By virtue of their ordained ministry, deacons are especially called to lead these Sunday assemblies. " ... it belongs to [the deacon] to lead the prayers, to proclaim the gospel, to preach the homily and to give communion." ^{xx}

27. If an ordained minister is not available to preside over the Sunday Assembly, an authorised parishioner will lead the liturgy.

I. Liturgy of the Hours.

28. "If the faithful come together and unite their hearts and voices in the Liturgy of the Hours, they manifest the Church celebrating the mystery of Christ." The Liturgy of the Hours is an alternative to the Liturgy of the Word, and is designed "to sanctify the day and all human activity."

"The divine office, in keeping with ancient Christian tradition, is so devised that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God."

At this stage, few of the faithful would be familiar with the liturgy, so experience of the liturgy and catechesis would be needed. In "Morning or Evening Prayer it is not normal to insert the three readings of the Sundays or to add a communion service."

J. Weekday Liturgical Celebrations.

29. Where daily Mass is not available, it is recommended that local communities celebrate a Liturgy of the Word with or without Communion. Alternatively, the Liturgy of the Hours (without communion) may be celebrated.

- i. Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours 1.
- ii. Catechism of the Catholic Church 1343.
- iii. Sacrosanctum Concilium 56.
- iv. Cf. Dei Verbum 21.
- v. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 10.
- vi. Catechism of the Catholic Church 2180; CIC. Can 1247, 1248 §1.
- vii. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 35 (4).
- viii. Catechism of the Catholic Church 2182.
- ix. Eucharisticum Mysterium 9
- x. Lumen Gentium 26, 28.
- xi. Cf. Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours 11.
- xii. Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours 11.
- xiii. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 48.
- xiv. Catechism of the Catholic Church 2183; CIC Can. 1248 §2.
- xv. This serves as another reminder that the celebrations are temporary solutions and cannot adequately substitute for the Eucharistic Sacrifice.
- xvi. Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours 16.
- xvii. See CIC Can 766; 767.
- xviii. Any exception to this requires the Archbishop's approval.
- xix. Consideration needs to be given especially to aged and semi-incapacitated parishioners. It is noteworthy that the 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey revealed that the median age of Australia's Mass-going Catholics is 51.9 years, and this would be higher in some of the older parishes of the Archdiocese.
- xx. Paul VI, Motu proprio, "Ad pascendum" (15 August 1972) No.1.

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