

Document of orientation for the Sunday Assemblies in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration

The Lord's Day

INTRODUCTION

In the last several years the situation of our parishes has evolved considerably. Some have been re-organized, clusters have been created, pastoral staff has been redistributed. All this has caused significant changes in our way of providing pastoral services, especially the eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and weekdays. In other times it was possible to attend Mass every day and, virtually, at an hour of one's choosing on Sunday.

The decrease in the numbers of the faithful has entailed the re-organization of parishes and a reduction in the number of eucharistic gatherings. The priests, less numerous and more fragile, barely suffice for the numerous pastoral tasks that fall upon them. In a not inconsiderable number of fields they can fortunately count on the efficient help of lay people who co-ordinate parish activities and of agents who work in the different sectors of pastoral ministry. But the number of Masses celebrated on Sunday has diminished, for this responsibility cannot be shared. In some cases the Sunday eucharistic service cannot be guaranteed in any continuous manner.

To deal with the situation, some of our Christian communities have had recourse to other kinds of Sunday observances such as that which it is appropriate to call Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration (ADACE, in the French acronym). Other communities are thinking of launching such gatherings to make provision for the day when the number of priests will no longer be sufficient. This poses the question of the meaning of a Sunday celebration without the Eucharist. Does a Liturgy of the Word suffice, particularly if it is accompanied by the distribution of communion?

Speaking of Sunday, three elements remain inseparable : the Day of the Risen Lord, the ecclesial assembly and the eucharistic celebration. The three remain inseparable by virtue of a foundational tradition that the Church deems itself unable to modify. It is,

primarily and fundamentally, on Sunday that the Risen Lord, by his Eucharist, gathers his Church together, and causes it to participate in his life.¹

For the purpose of remaining faithful in celebrating the Lord's Day when it is no longer possible to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist within each community, we offer a reflection on « The Day of the Lord » and some orientations capable of supporting a discernment as to the advisability of celebrating a Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration, with guides for its enactment.

SUNDAY : DAY OF THE LORD

dies dominicus

day of the new creation and of the expectation of the Lord's final coming
the eighth day

ORIGIN

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”.²

Since its beginning the Church has always had at its heart the celebration of the Lord's Day, in commemoration of the day when Christ was raised from the dead. At all times Christians have regarded as essential to their identity the Sunday gathering at which we encounter the Risen Lord here and now in order to live that encounter until he comes in glory³.

The Ecumenical Council Vatican Two reminded us of this : «The Church celebrates the Pascal mystery, in virtue of an apostolic tradition that goes back to the very day of the Resurrection of Christ, on every eighth day, which is quite rightly called the Day of the Lord, or Sunday. On this day the faithful are in fact to assemble so that they may, by hearing the Word of God, and participating in the Eucharist, bring to mind the passion, the resurrection and the glory of the Lord Jesus, and give thanks to God who “has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1 : 3). The dominical day is therefore the feast day of the first rank. »⁴

On the basis of this venerable tradition, we can identify three components essential to a complete celebration of the Lord's Day : *the assembly, the teaching and the act of thanksgiving.*

¹ According to the Episcopal Commission for the Liturgy, « Le Dimanche », Paris, Centurion, (1991) p. 146.

² Acts 2 : 42.

³ National Liturgy Office. Pastoral Notes for Assemblées dominicales en attente de célébration eucharistique. Études canadiennes en liturgie No 6 (1996) p. 39, No. 4.

⁴ Constitution on the Liturgy, No. 106.

The assembly (εκκλησια)

The assembly is the gathering of the faithful by the Lord. It demonstrates that the Church is not born of itself but convoked by God. It is, properly speaking, the people of God, organically structured, the priest presiding who acts in the person of Christ the head.

So constituted, the assembly can dispose itself to listen to the Word of God by being attentive to the proclamation of the Scriptures as well as to its application by the priest or the deacon in the homily. Then, under the presidency of the priest, the assembly celebrates the eucharistic sacrifice that makes the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection an event of today. At the end the faithful, joined in Sunday worship, are dispersed into the world to proclaim the Gospel there in word and deed.

In the absence of a priest, the people of God are nevertheless called to Sunday worship so that they may remain a sign of the Church, that they may testify to their faith in the Risen Christ, that they may listen to his Word and pray with one voice. This gathering is witness at the same time to the hope of his coming again in glory at the end of time.

The teaching (διδασκαλια)

The teaching, through the reading of the Word and the commentary, constitutes one of the essential components of the celebration of the Lord's Day. Moreover, the community gathered around the Scriptures testifies to its faith in the real presence of the Risen Lord while his Word is being proclaimed in Church.

As Council Vatican II reminds us, Christ « is present in His Word, for it is He who speaks when we read the Sacred Scriptures in Church. Finally, he is there present when the Church prays and sings the psalms, as he has promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18 : 20).»⁵

The act of thanksgiving (ευχαριστια)

« The Church finds its foundation in the eucharistic action where the remembrance of the Lord's deeds is celebrated sacramentally. There it touches its roots, educates itself and renews itself. »⁶

It is in and by the eucharist that the Body of Christ is built. For the life of the Risen Lord circulates there in each of its members. Everyone is called to receive the Body of Christ while responding to the invitation of the Fathers : « Become that which you receive. » This act of thanksgiving further unfolds through the mission in the world, in the life of every day, where Christians, nourished by the Word and the Bread, sustained by their

⁵ Constitution on the Liturgy No. 7.

⁶ Pastoral Notes, op.cit. p. 40, No. 7b.

participation in the assembly, commit themselves to human activities under the banner of the Gospel.

**« The bread that we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ?
For we being many are one bread, and one body,
for we are all partakers of that one bread. »⁷**

SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES IN ANTICIPATION OF EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

**“ Where two or three are gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them. ”⁸**

« The Church recognizes that the eucharistic celebration remains the most exalted form of praise and prayer. However, where communities are unable to celebrate the Eucharist, believers are no less bound to come together to feast at the table of the Word and to raise to the Lord their prayers of praise and supplication. »⁹

This is to say, therefore, that where the eucharist cannot be celebrated, the Christian faithful are nevertheless called to an assembly that unites them around the Word of God. This word is considered substantial nourishment, for it expresses one of the actual presences of Christ in the midst of his people. Thus inscribed in an authentic liturgy of the Church, the Word convokes the People of God, feeds them and sends them on mission.¹⁰

Because the Day of the Lord must be celebrated, the community is therefore called in the absence of the priest to gather for the reading of the Scriptures and for common prayer, and to be sent into the world to bear witness to the Gospel. This community, convoked and assembled, remains the sign of faith in the Risen Christ and becomes testimony to the world.

A DISCERNMENT TO BE EXERCISED IN CHURCH

Since the deprivation of the Sunday Eucharist remains an anomaly for a community, Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration observances « shall be considered a provisional measure, never a definitive solution. »¹¹ It will always be necessary to insist on the exceptional and temporary aspect of this measure.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10 : 16-17.

⁸ Matthew 18 : 20.

⁹ Pastoral Notes, *op. cit.* p. 6 No. 5.

¹⁰ According to the Pastoral Notes, *op. cit.* p.6, No.7.

¹¹ Directory of the Congregation for the Divine Cult for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, (June 30, 1988).

The decision to authorize the celebration of Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration is reserved to the Bishop after consultation with his presbyteral council ¹². It is he who must confirm the pastoral, theological and liturgical validity of this kind of observance.

Before a request is made to the Bishop, there are some criteria to be considered in discerning the need:

- The opportunity to re-organize the local communities for celebration of the Eucharist;
- The revision of the Mass schedule in the pastoral sector and, if possible, the assurance that the Eucharist will always be celebrated in a principal church;
- Constant verification of the possibility of having recourse to available priests or religious who are in a position to celebrate, while taking care that they have as much of a connection as possible with the community to which they are sent;
- The quality of the fraternal life of the community;
- The mobility of church members in an urban or rural environment. It is necessary to evaluate the chances of people moving from one place to another and to take account of their situation;
- The presence of a qualified team able to take charge of the celebration;
- The importance of following, to the fullest extent possible, the principle established by the directory for Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest: « a meeting or an assembly of this nature may never take place on a Sunday in locations where Mass has been or will be celebrated on the same day, which means also the eve of the day, even if it is in another language; likewise it is not appropriate to repeat such an assembly on the same day. »¹³

TYPES OF SUNDAY ASSEMBLIES IN ANTICIPATION OF EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

When we contemplate the celebration of a Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration, there are other decisions to be taken :

- The choice of type of Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration: Liturgy of the Word with or without distribution of communion or the Psalmic Liturgy of the Evening or of the Morning :
 - The celebration of the Word is a true liturgical act. This means that Jesus Christ is really present in the Word proclaimed and that he enters into dialogue with his people. In prayer and song the congregation responds to his call and translates his desire for commitment into daily life.

¹² Pastoral Notes, *op.cit.* p.31 No. 24.

¹³ See the Pastoral Notes *op.cit.* p. 31, No. 21. We shall examine with great care the possibility of departing from this last principle in cases where it would appear necessary to offer more than one Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration at the same location on Sunday.

- We can foresee the distribution of communion during a Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration, but this shall not become routine. In this situation, to avoid any confusion with the eucharistic celebration, a preparatory catechesis will be offered to members of the community.¹⁴ It should be understood that if eucharistic communion is habitually offered outside Mass, there is a risk of confusion and of devaluation of the Eucharist as well as of the ministerial priesthood.
- The Psalmic Liturgy of the Morning or of the Evening is inspired by the Liturgy of the Hours. The community prays the psalms proposed, be they for Sunday morning, or for the eve of the day, on Saturday evening. It takes the texts of Scripture provided for this particular Sunday.

OBSERVANCE

Once authorization has been received to hold a Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration, it is the responsibility of each community :

➤ In the long term :

- To notify the community of the holding of the Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration and guarantee an appropriate catechesis by making the difference between such a celebration and the celebration of the Eucharist perfectly clear. Any confusion between these two kinds of celebration will cause people to lose the sense of the Eucharist properly celebrated;
- To entrust the animation of the Sunday Assembly in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration to members of the community trained and delegated by the pastor and remaining under his responsibility;
- To use the book of celebration, *Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours*, as the principal reference for the observance of the celebration.¹⁵
- To be in a position, in cases where the priest might be prevented at the last moment from celebrating the Eucharist, to rely on persons able to step in and lead the prayers of the congregation. They could make use of a procedure adapted and prepared in advance, or, in a case of urgency, use *Living with Christ*, omitting the eucharistic prayer and certain other prayers directly connected to the Eucharist (for example, the offertory prayer and the prayer after communion).

¹⁴ For clarification of a decision in this sense, we may refer to theological and pastoral note No. 3 of the Theology Committee of the Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops titled : « *Communier ou non aux célébrations de la Parole? Un discernement à exercer.* » (November 27, 2007).

¹⁵ National Liturgy Office, CCCB. (1995). These *Pastoral Notes for Assemblées dominicales en attente de célébration eucharistique* will constitute a complementary reference.

➤ In the short term :

- The « presidency » over the prayers of the congregation will be assumed by a person designated by the priest responsible for the community. This person becomes responsible for the whole proceedings during the celebration. He leads the prayers of the congregation from the place chosen for this purpose, a place other than the presidential seat of the priest and a reasonable distance from it. He recalls the presence of Christ through and in the assembly. The Liturgy of the Word is at the heart of the celebration. The Word of God is proclaimed from the lectern with the use of the lectionary. The biblical readings are those of the liturgical date, that is to say, the readings proper to the Sunday. In the absence of an ordained minister, lay people may be authorized by the Bishop to offer a reflection on the Word of God.
- If there is a communion liturgy, it is important for the faithful to understand that communion is always a participation in a eucharistic celebration experienced by an assembled community. Ideally, the eucharistic bread, in preference to being taken from the location's altar of reservation, will be brought from a neighbouring place of worship where the Eucharist is celebrated on the same day.
- It is at the moment of conclusion that the offerings will be received and information concerning the life of the community will be communicated. There will follow the benediction provided in the ritual and the dismissal of the congregation sent to perform its concrete mission in the world.

For a better understanding of the eucharistic mystery, it would be good if « the faithful who participate regularly in Sunday Assemblies in Anticipation of Eucharistic Celebration could experience the various models of celebration, not only the celebration of the Word with eucharistic communion. Thus they might get to know different forms of meeting in prayer and of sharing of the Word, for they can deepen their sense of the Eucharist even when they have the experience of doing without it, of « fasting » from the Eucharist. »¹⁶

CONCLUSION

***“ For I have given you an example,
that you should do as I have done to you.”***¹⁷

« The Word of God, the Eucharist and the sacerdotal ministry are gifts that the Lord offers to the Church, His bride. They must be welcomed and, even more, requested as a grace of God. It is in the Sunday assembly that the Church rejoices most fervently

¹⁶ Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops. Theological and pastoral note No. 3, *op.cit.*

¹⁷ John 13 : 15.

over such gifts, for she gives thanks there to God, in anticipation of the full joy of the Day of the Lord. »¹⁸

The celebration of the Eucharist constitutes the indispensable point of reference for the celebration of the Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours. The latter cannot be understood by itself as an independent entity of equal value. This is stated, in the rite drafted for the *Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours*, in the first proposition for opening the celebration :

*Today, on this Day of the Lord,
everywhere in the world,
the People of God are gathered
to listen to the Word of God,
and to respond to it with praise.
We await in hope the day
when we shall be able again
to celebrate the Eucharist in memory
of the death and resurrection of Christ.
Our community is gathered
in communion with the whole Church.
We are likewise joined
with our pastor ...
with our brothers and sisters
in communities nearby
who sanctify this Day of the Lord
by celebrating the feast of the Lord.*

Done and signed at Longueuil, this 26th of January, 2009.

↙ Jacques Berthelet, C.S.V.
Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil

Jean-Pierre Camerlain, priest
Chancellor

¹⁸ Pastoral Notes op.cit. p.30, No. 17