

## Celebrating the Lord's Day

A few years ago we were all too aware of the devastation that encompassed the Asian part of our world. There were thousands of lives that were lost in the tsunami. But there was also a story in U. S. News and World Report of a parish in Sri Lanka that was spared. Since it was the feast of the Holy Family, Fr. Pathinathan decided to move Mass from St. Peter's church to a chapel of St. Joseph, the head of the Holy Family. The chapel was a mile inland from the sea. The church was near the beach. When the deadly tsunami struck, the parishioners were at Mass. They were spared.

The sheer randomness of those who lived and those who died is fascinating. The decision of going to Mass that morning meant the difference between life and death. On that day as they held Mass at the shrine, it started late at 7:20 because they had difficulty with the sound system. They had a guest giving the homily, he went on and on. They had a procession during Mass that they don't normally have. At the end of Mass, Fr. Pathinathan blessed each of the families. Mass went until almost 9:00 when they heard people shouting, "The sea is coming! The water is as tall as the palm trees!" All of the people of the town were swept away except for the 1500 that were at Mass that day.

It was fascinating because of the lives that were spared and the sheer coincidence of the sound system, having the Mass at the shrine, having a guest speaker, going through the procession, and having all of the families being blessed. So was the fate of this parish. The pastor said, if Mass had ended even 10 minutes earlier, the parishioners would have gotten home in time to be victims of the tsunami. Was this event a coincidence or random? We will never know.

What we do know is the importance of worshipping and giving thanks to God as part of our week. This belief came to us from our ancestors who believed in going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. This was to keep holy the Lord's Day, to give God the honor due to Yahweh. As we have in scripture that the Lord spent six days creating the heavens and the earth and all that is a part of them and then rested on the seventh day. This tradition was carried on down to the present day.

The early Christians gathered to celebrate the Lord's Day, the day when Jesus resurrected from the dead. This was a memorial to his Passion, Death, and Resurrection. (The day of the Sabbath changed from Saturday to Sunday to commemorate the death of the Lord.) When the early Christian community gathered, they snuck into each other's homes to celebrate the Eucharist. They did this in part because they were afraid to be caught by the rulers and thrown into jail or become entertainment on a Sunday afternoon at the Coliseum. There was fear but there was also bravery. They were not afraid to be martyred because they believed in the Lord. Many of the early Christians died for their faith.

It is incomprehensible to us today because we have the freedom of worshipping God as we choose every Sunday. It is also amazing to note that this is not the case in many parts of the world. A teacher in one of our schools told me that when she lived with her family in Saudi Arabia, they had to sneak out to someone's home to go to Mass. There would be a priest who would arrive and say Mass. They celebrated Eucharist together. If they would have been caught, they would have been beheaded. It was so precious to them to have the presence of Jesus in their life that they risked gathering together on a Sunday evening.

Not only is it important to recognize the community we worship with and celebrate our faith together as a community; it is important for us to spend time with God and thank God for the blessings that have been bestowed on us. All we have to do is see the many things that we have that other people do not have. We are indeed blessed and need to be thankful of God for the blessings we have received.

We gather together as a worshipping community on Sunday. It is how our community recognizes that the Lord is present in their midst. The most important element of our faith is that Jesus is present to us in the Eucharist. That is why we gather together at Mass to receive our Lord as often as we can. Sure our Lord is present in each and every one of us, but this cannot compare to receiving the body and blood of our Lord as often as we are able.

Celebrating the Lord's Day in our life is important. It is important to keep holy the Lord's Day. It is important to receive the Lord in our life. It is important to give thanks to God for the blessings we have. It is important to be present to our community of believers. God is present in our life as it was for the people who attended Mass that Sunday morning in Sri Lanka. If we would have been in that village that Sunday morning would we have been devoured by the tsunami or would we have been with the 1500 villagers that were saved?

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