

Pope urges rest on Sunday

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Sunday prayer and rest is a human need and a religious obligation, Pope John Paul II said in a new apostolic letter.

In the letter published July 7 at the Vatican, the pope focused on "the duty to keep Sunday holy, especially by sharing in the Eucharist and by relaxing in a spirit of Christian joy and fraternity."

Dies Domini ("The Day of the Lord") reaffirmed church teaching that Catholics must attend Sunday Mass and that other Sunday activities should be in harmony with the sacred character of the day.

While not criticizing store openings, entertainment and sporting events on a Sunday, the pope said all people have a right to a day of rest, and the Sunday rest should be dedicated first of all to communal prayer and praise of God.

Sundays are a very appropriate day for an after-Mass trip to the countryside, seaside or mountains, he said.

"As the day on which man is at peace with God, with himself and with others, Sunday becomes a moment when people can look anew upon the wonders of nature" and praise their Creator, he said.

Although the church's teaching about Sundays "may merge naturally with the human need for rest, it is faith alone which gives access to its deeper meaning and ensures that it will not become banal and trivialized," the pope said.

Pope John Paul said he wrote the letter to encourage people who make Sunday Mass the center of their week and to exhort those who have given up the practice.

"In the minds of many of the faithful, not only the sense of the centrality of the

Eucharist but even the sense of the duty to give thanks to the Lord and to pray to him with others in the community of the church, seems to be diminishing," the pope said.

Keeping the Lord's day holy is so important that it is included in the Ten Commandments and in the Code of Canon Law, he said.

Just as for the Jewish community, the pope said, the Catholic obligation to observe the Lord's day is "not just a matter of community religious discipline, but a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God."

Christians celebrate Sunday as the Lord's day, instead of marking the Saturday Sabbath, because they are remembering each week the victory of Jesus on Easter Sunday, he said.

Because it is an Easter celebration, Sunday Mass must be a gathering marked by obvious joy, the pope said.

"The festive character of the Sunday Eucharist expresses the joy that Christ communicates to his church through the gift of the Spirit," he said.

The pope called on pastors and those involved in parish liturgies to give particular attention to the songs chosen for Sunday Mass, "since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuating the solemnity of the celebration and fostering the sense of a common faith and a shared love."

Special care also must be taken in preparing the homily, he said.

After listening to the Gospel and participating in the eucharistic sacrifice, he said, Catholics must leave the Mass with a renewed commitment to performing works of charity, promoting solidarity and sharing the Gospel message with others.



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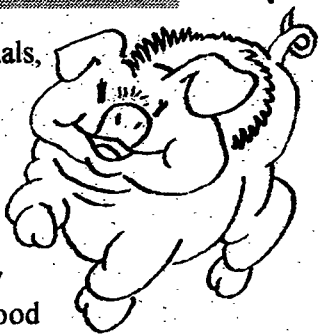
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