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April 15, 2012

Resurrection on the First Day of the Week

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Resurrection on the First Day of the Week

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This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

Second Sunday of Easter

Sunday Readings for April 15, 2012 for Cycle B:

Acts 4:32-35; Ps 118; 1 Jn 5:1-6; Jn 20:19-31

RESURRECTION ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

Lawrence E. Frizzell

By a tradition handed down from the Apostles, which took its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery every seventh day... On this day Christ's faithful are bound to come together into one place. They should listen to the Word of God and take part in the Eucharist, thus calling to mind the passion, resurrection and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and give thanks to God... (Vatican II, *The Sacred Liturgy* #106).

The ancient Hebrew teaching that Israelites should rest on the seventh day in imitation of the Creator (Exodus 20:8-11) was reinforced by many precisions over the centuries. The Sabbath, when everyone rested from all forms of work, was a time of worship accompanied by an experience of peace with God that pointed to God's kingdom. Following the same pattern, the seventh year became the time for letting the land lie fallow, forgiving debts and releasing slaves (see Deuteronomy 15:1-18).

Certainly Jesus and the early Christians, who came from a Jewish background, had a profound respect for the Sabbath and the rhythms of worship and rest associated with the seventh day. So anything that Jesus did on the Sabbath must not be interpreted as mere disregard for the Law, but rather these words and deeds have a profound pedagogical significance. How, then, did the Church shift the pattern of worship to the first day of the week?

The Gospel according to John offers a clue with its opening statement: "In the beginning was the Word..." This echo of the hymn of creation (Genesis 1:1-2:4) sets the cosmic framework in which the drama of Word-made-flesh takes place. The Paschal Mystery consists in the new Exodus of Jesus from this world to the Father to accomplish the forgiveness of sin and to bring eternal life to the world. This new creation, bestowing the gift of the Holy Spirit, took place "on the first day of the week" (John 20:1, 19).

Just as the Creator breathed life into the inert form of the first human being (Genesis 2:7), so the risen Lord breathed upon his disciples and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). The great obstacle to human participation in the peace of God's kingdom is sin, as Jesus had indicated by linking sin and sickness in some of his healing miracles. The harmony of each person with God, neighbor and the cosmos is restored when sins are forgiven; this ministry of God's Word is now a responsibility of the Church. Already Jesus had commissioned his disciples according to the pattern of his own mission from the heavenly Father (John 20:21). Now the gift of God's Spirit, who satisfies all who thirst for life-giving water (John 7:37-39), cleanses the faithful from

sins. This ministry of reconciliation is rooted in the death of Jesus as God's Lamb (see John 1:29) and it is carried out in his Name.

The effects of this work of the Apostles is described by St. Luke: the believers in Jerusalem, the City of Peace, "were of one heart and soul" in their worship of God and in care for each other by sharing everything in common (Acts 4:32). Probably these first Christians were living according to the sabbatical laws, since Luke linked the ministry of Jesus to the seventh year (see Luke 4:19).

This ideal of peaceful living in anticipation of God's kingdom was not demanded of the faithful (Acts 5:1-11), yet its witness challenged all to place the service of God and neighbor first in their daily lives. Those who take the vow of poverty in the service of the Church continue to offer this same challenge in every generation. All Christians should aspire to the simplicity of life that enables us to overcome greed and to reach out to others in their needs.

"With great power the Apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). Every aspect of the Church's witness is but a dimension of her faith in the resurrection of Jesus, a call to all human beings in every age. In the midst of daily labors and struggles, people who do not know God's plan should see the example of that simplicity which comes from faith in the riches brought by Christ's gift of peace.