

A Catechism on the Sunday Eucharist

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On the third and final day of the Theological Symposium held at the Cebu Doctors University in connection to the 51st International Eucharistic Congress, a Filipina educator and lay Church collaborator, Dr. Josefina M. Manabat, presented a catechesis on the Sunday Eucharist.

Manabat points to the great importance Vatican II has accorded the Sunday Eucharist, tracing its origin to the weekly celebration of the Paschal mystery by the first Christians led by the Apostles. Sunday has always been referred to as “the first day” of the week based on the day when Jesus rose from the dead but also when the Apostles first encountered the Risen Christ. The speaker sees a great pastoral benefit if the Sunday Eucharist can be presented to the people not only as the day of God’s resurrection but also as the day he appeared to his disciples after the resurrection. Manabat recalls the words of the third-century martyr Tertullian: *the flesh is the threshold of salvation*. The Risen Christ, Manabat avers, would henceforth continue to appear to his disciples in sensible ways—the Sunday gathering, the word proclaimed, and the bread broken and shared.

The speaker proposes the Gospel account of the two disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24: 13–35) who walked with the Risen Christ, listened to him speak, but was enlightened only upon the breaking of bread. These two disciples who belonged to the bigger number of Jesus’ followers had grown familiar with the way Jesus taught and broke the bread in many other occasions. “*It was this familiarity that helped them recognize the Lord as he spoke to them and as he broke the bread,*” Manabat points out.

If the hearts of the two disciples burned within them as they listened to Jesus speak, many other Christians could simply not live without the Eucharist. “*Sine dominico non possumus!*” “*Without the Eucharist we cannot live!*” The speaker mentions the many stories of persecution inflicted on Christians who insisted to celebrate the Eucharist despite the threat of death. As an example, Manabat cites the path to martyrdom chosen by about fifty Christians when they had chosen to celebrate the Eucharist in Abythinia in North Africa despite strong warning from the authorities.

Manabat then refers to the observation made by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines stating that “*for the majority of the faithful it is the chief (sometimes, unfortunately, the only) occasion when they experience the Church.*” The faithful encounter the Risen Christ by assembly, word, and sacrament. Through such an encounter the believers are summoned and sent to mission in the manner of the two disciples of Emmaus.



The speaker takes exception to John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* where the Pope decries the alarming decline in the Sunday observance of Sunday as a day of rest and worship. She paints the Philippine scenario, as regards Sunday Mass attendance, in a vivid and hopeful light although she says that the Church in the Philippines cannot afford to be complacent lest Sunday be relegated to a time of simple rest and relaxation.

Manabat cites the fact how the early Church Fathers also called Sunday as **the eighth day** that signifies the extension of the weekly cycle outside the temporal sphere, signifying a new reality based on Christian hope. She cites Saint Augustine: *“So the day which was first will also be the eighth, so that the first might not be done away with, but rather made eternal.”*

Sunday as a day of rest, according to Manabat acknowledges that material things and secular pursuits are not absolute values, quoting a line from Pope Francis



who writes in *Laudato Si* regarding Sunday that is meant to *“heal our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the world.”*

Manabat refers to Christians working on Sunday for survival and points out how the Church assumes a sympathetic disposition to those existing on a hand-to-mouth existence.

The speaker attempts to present a complete picture of faithful believers who make charitable work part of their day, volunteering their professional services in parishes or in the community. Families, aside from gathering together for Sunday lunch or dinner, also find their connection with their departed dead by visiting their graves. She also cites Sunday celebration of the Eucharist in the absence of a priest but with responsible and well-formed lay leaders.

In the midst of the current Philippine realities *vis-a-vis* Sunday Eucharistic celebration, Manabat underlines the pattern—Assembly, Word, Eucharist, Mission—that continues to form the Filipino believers as a covenanted people.

- Fr. Paul J. Marquez, SSP

