

THE DAY OF THE LORD

BY

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Hæc est dies quam fecit Dominus: exultemus et letemur in ea!



UNDAY, the day of joy, commemorates the cause of our joy and looks forward to its consummation in eternity. There can be no Christian life without Sunday, no Sunday without the Mass. Here is the setting of the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and its acceptance is the condition of any Christian recovery. Too often Sunday is confused with its secondary aspects: obligations, abstention from servile work, the merely natural rest in the cycle of time demanded by man's nature. But the first day of the week is the day of resurrection, far older as a feast than Easter. Its holiness enshrines the central mystery of Faith, and the Sabbath that marks the creative rest of God is transfigured now into the day of the new creation of grace.

At Lyons, in September, a national Congress of the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* assembled to honour the Lord's Day. In France there is an ever-quickening current of Catholic opinion which sees that one necessary thing precedes all Catholic 'action': and that thing is the renewal of the life of the Christian community as such, in the thousands of parishes that together make up the Church. As a spectacle, the presence of a score of bishops and thousands of priests and hundreds of lay folk, united in their intention to work and pray for such a renewal, was something to marvel at. There is no room here to attempt a summary of the proceedings of the Congress, with its addresses by such men as Professor Romano Guardini, Fathers Congar, Féret, Daniélou, Canon Cardijn, the Abbés Michonneau and Chevallier, and many more. The papers are soon to be published, and one hopes that many English Catholics may want to read them. Here one may try to recall how the Congress made living and concrete the Dominical reality: the day of the Lord that is, therefore, the day of joy and brotherhood, the day of the Christian family as redeemed.

The Liturgy is not an optional setting for Christian worship: it is that worship, and individual sanctification must find in the collective praise of the Mystical Body the release it needs to save it from a sterile introspection. The basilica at Fourvière, standing fortress-like above the city of Lyons, was the setting for the liturgical fact which the addresses and discussions sought to illuminate. Perhaps the most

striking feature of all was the daily community mass, sung by all with a lightness of heart that powerfully expressed the unity of the people of God. Hundreds of priests joined with the laity in Holy Communion, singing with them the gradual psalms as they made their way processionally to the altar. Here indeed one sensed the force of Père Congar's appeal for a return to the totality of Catholic life: not a hierarchy, merely, but a family. And at the Pontifical Mass of the Lyons rite in the Cathedral, the splendours of that most prodigal of liturgies were enriched by the communion of the people, again led by many priests.

But Congresses are rare affairs, and their effect must be looked for in the parish churches, deprived of the help of the thousands who are met together because they are convinced of a need that is still unknown to the great majority. In a suburb of Lyons, at Notre Dame-Saint Alban, one was able to see the application of the vital idea of the Lord's Day as the setting in time of the Christian family. Here, in a simple church, Mass is said facing the people. All take part, offering their hosts for communion, mentioning their needs at the *Memento* of the Canon, singing as they go to Communion, and meeting afterwards for breakfast. It is a living community: not eclectic or self-consciously 'liturgical', but ordinary and lovable—the baker, the tram-driver, the medical student, the nurse, and many mothers with their children. All this is the result of years of work by a devoted priest, who has created something which, far more than any Congress, expresses what it means to be a member of the Church.

The *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* is not an academic body. True, it provides the help of experts who, in every sphere of scholarship, have provided the material the pastor needs. Its primary concern is pastoral: there is no ready English word for the noun, but it must be explained that 'pastorale' is the essential, and 'liturgique' is its specification. And Sunday is not only a matter of ecclesiastical obligation. Indeed, the notions of 'compulsory' mass and abstention from servile work are developments intended to fortify the *mysterium* which Sunday, the weekly celebration of the resurrection, proclaims and makes available to the Christian family. Sunday is a day of joy, of release from the servitude of material things. We were given at Lyons many indications of what a Christian Sunday might include: a *kermesse* in the open air, with dancing and songs and the delightful *Guignol lyonnaise*; a performance of Claudel's *Annonce faite à Marie*; cinema shows, designed to help the formation of film-clubs through which the passivity of audiences may be stirred into intelligent criticism; and, always, the joy of meeting and talking, extending the theme of the liturgical gathering in the morning to the rest of a day which wholly belongs to God.

It is idle to suppose that the restoration of its birthright to the ordinary parish can end with the *Ite missa est* of the Mass. Certainly the immediate task is a liturgical one *tout court*: to encourage that active, and therefore responsible, share in the Church's worship which visibly and vocally proclaims the presence of the people of God. But springing from that is the life of the parish as a community, one that is not merely brought together haphazardly—and dumbly—once a week, but which finds in all its activities the extension of that central act of worship. One of the greatest needs of contemporary Catholicism is what one can only call, with the French, a *mystique du dimanche* which will take into account all the circumstances, sociological as well as spiritual, of Christian life today.

The Lyons Congress ended with a pilgrimage to Ars, and it is hard to give an adequate idea of the joy of that gathering in the remote little village, which for all time will be famous for the heroic work of its curé, who so deeply realised the meaning of the Lord's Day. Ars today has all the marks of a place of pilgrimage: the ambitious basilica attached so bizarrely to the simple church made holy by St John Vianney, the rows of shops, the guides, the cafés. But if you climb to the hill from which the curé first saw the scene of his life's work, and where today a delightful statue commemorates his meeting with the shepherd lad who showed him the way, Ars seems a symbol of the Christian community, sheltering under the church, bridging the gap between the house of God and the houses of the men and women who are called to be his friends.

At Ars, mass was said by an anonymous 'curé de France', and Cardinal Gerlier did well to remind us that a liturgical congress could end in no better place than on the battlefield which St John Vianney made glorious: the parish church, where the common people meet to praise God and to implore his aid. The lesson perhaps is that a Christian renewal, like so much else, begins at home—in the familiar setting, with the providentially 'given' circumstances we find. And each Sunday as it comes is, for priest and people alike, a fresh opportunity to rediscover the springs of our life in Christ. Once the fulness of the day of the Lord is known, all its holiness and joy and light and life, there need be no fear for the future. Seek the source, and all the streams of living water that come from it will pour forth into the lives of a people that is redeemed and free.

[NOTE. The publications of the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* may be obtained from BLACKFRIARS PUBLICATIONS, its English agents.]