

On the First Day of the Week

Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 20 through 23

What We Found

A thread thirteen weeks long resolved at Troas. "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread" (20:7): the Resurrection's own day, an assembly whose stated purpose was the bread, word running long and then the loaf broken before dawn, and Paul budgeting seven days in the city to be present for it. The Catechism quotes this very verse: it was above all on the first day of the week that the Christians met to break bread, and from that time down to our own day the celebration has continued, with the same fundamental structure (CCC 1343). You have kept the Troas appointment every Sunday of your life. And in the middle of that first recorded Sunday assembly, young Eutychus fell asleep in the window, fell three stories, and was raised when Paul fell upon him and embraced him, an embrace that recalls Elijah and Elisha raising the dead raising the dead: death entered the Sunday assembly and resurrection answered it, with the Eucharist at the center.

At Miletus, Paul gave the presbyters of Ephesus his farewell, calling those same elders, in Luke's Greek, episkopoi, overseers (the RSV2CE renders it guardians), made so "by the Holy Spirit," and commanding them to shepherd "the church of God which he obtained with his own blood" (20:28). He warned that fierce wolves would come, even from among their own selves: Scripture's own realism about failing shepherds, commanded to vigilance, not naivete. And he left us a treasure: "remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'", a saying of Christ found in no Gospel, carried by the Church's living memory until Acts wrote it down.

Then the road to Jerusalem, and we discovered that Luke shaped it deliberately on his Master's: the resolute journey against all pleading, Agabus's prophetic sign with the belt, Paul's Gethsemane ("I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name"), the community's surrender ("The will of the Lord be done"), the temple seizure, and the mob's cry "Away with him!", an echo, nearly word for word, of the shout raised against Jesus. To belong to the Way is to walk the Master's shape of road. And at the section's end, the Lord stood by Paul in the night: "as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome."

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Magnesians, 9 (around AD 107)

St. Ignatius describes the first Christians as no longer keeping the sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord's Day, on which also our life rose again through Him. Within living memory of the apostles, the first day of the week, the day of Troas, was already the Church's day.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV.18 and V.2 (2nd century)

Our teaching agrees with the Eucharist, said St. Irenaeus, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our teaching: the bread and cup, having received the Word of God, become the body and blood of Christ. What the Church does on the first day of the week is her doctrine made visible.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great, Pastoral Rule (6th century)

St. Gregory took Miletus as his charter for shepherds: keep watch, for the wolves Paul foretold do come, from outside and within; and let the ruler of souls remember whose blood purchased the flock he tends, for he watches over what God valued at the price of Himself.

Live It This Week

Two assignments, one for Sunday and one for the week. First, keep Troas: attend this Sunday's Mass deliberately gathered to break bread: arrive early enough to be recollected, follow the two-course shape you now know by heart, word then bread, and receive, if properly disposed, with the thought that the same fundamental structure has run unbroken from that lamplit upper room to your parish. If it has been a long time since Confession, let this be the week. Second, live the unwritten word: perform one act this week that is pure giving, with no possibility of return, saying the sentence to yourself as you do it: it is more blessed to give than to receive. You will be quoting Jesus by heart, from the Church's memory, exactly as Paul did.

Memory Verse

"...remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)

Before Next Session

Read Acts 24 through 28, the finale, once, all the way to the last sentence. And FIND YOUR TAKE-HOME 1 with your sealed guess from the first week, and bring it. Do not open it early. We have an appointment.

Catechism References

CCC 1343 (the first day, the breaking of bread) · CCC 2174-2175 (Sunday, the Lord's Day) · CCC 861-862 (the apostles' office of shepherding, handed on)