



What are you doing on Sunday?

A Lenten Reflection by William Crean, Bishop of Cloyne

Lent is Opportunity

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Lent is opportunity. It is an ideal time for us to review and re-evaluate the patterns of our lives. It affords us the opportunity to check out both what is going well and what needs changing.

When we ask the question "What are you doing on Sunday?" it can mean different things depending on the context. When I ask it in this context of Lent, I mean it as a 'trigger' to ask some further questions of one another about things sacred and spiritual in Ireland to-day.

There is no need to rehash the recent social and political developments that have led many commentators to suggest that we are now a modern, progressive and socially dynamic society. That is set in contrast to Irish society in the past that is commonly categorized as being backward and dysfunctional due to the excessive influence of the Catholic Church. There may be a measure of validity in this perspective. However, our recent history is more complex than the singular influence of the Catholic Church. We run the risk when attributing all our past afflictions to a single cause of having a simplistic single solution to our future which in the view of some, is the elimination of the Church from the public sphere and driving it into an entirely private realm. There are enough political voices whose objective is to do just that. We would be immeasurably poorer as a nation, were this to happen.

There is a scene in St. Matthew's Gospel (Mt: 28-34) which echoes an Old Testament (Lev: 16) concept of the scapegoat as the one on whom the sins of the people are cast and then sent out into the wilderness. So too, with the herd of pigs on whom the demons are cast upon only to be driven to oblivion over the cliff into the ocean. Believer and unbeliever alike must embrace our personal responsibility for the shaping of society into the future.



No single drop of water thinks it is responsible for the flood...

The way we are now

We may see ourselves as modern, dynamic and techno savvy. We are at the cutting edge of many developments and rightly proud of these achievements. Yet we are also host to so many social ills and personal demons, the fruits of which we see in tragic levels of suicide and chronic levels of mental illness especially among young people.

So, while we have so much to be thankful for, we seem unhappy and disenchanted. Life can be beautiful and fulfilling. It can also be difficult and very cruel. We need all the spiritual insights and personal wisdom to negotiate well the rapids of life, to stay positive and live with serenity and calm. That is why I ask the question "What are you doing on Sunday?" because your Sunday/Sabbath experience can have a huge impact on what happens on Monday to Saturday.

The way you live now

The question about Sunday is meant to prompt some deeper questions for you personally, for your family and the community that you rely on for support. We all realise that our society has and is changing rapidly. This rapid change stimulates us to be alert to these changes and strive to stay on top of them. This is happening in every corner of society. As we are drawn into this "striving mode" it tends to impact in all parts of our life. The image of the treadmill is often used to represent this experience. It becomes, for many, exhausting to try to keep up. It leads to anxiety, a sense of failure and even depression.

All these experiences have an emotional and spiritual dimension. Hence one needs to ask the question about our Sunday experience.



Sunday, Sabbath, Sacred, Spirit

We are not robots. Even computer programs occasionally ask us to tick a box to declare we are not a robot. We are thinking, feeling, rational and spiritual beings. Because these dimensions of our lives are mostly invisible does not make them less important, indeed, the contrary is the case. Our inner interior life is the key to our personhood. How we nurture and support our inner self, that core spiritual dimension is or should be an essential concern for us.

When I raise the question of Sunday, for many, the question of Sunday Mass will come to mind. I would not be surprised if this reflection is interpreted as an effort to get people back to Sunday Mass. For some it may assist them in review and discernment in their spiritual lives. However, my intention is more far reaching in that I would dearly wish and pray that as a society we do not walk blindfolded into social cul-de-sacs that will leave us deeply impoverished spiritually and which will have severe social consequences. So, while it is important for those who participate in our parish communities to know why they do so, it is equally important for those who have chosen not to be part of parish life to know why they have made that choice. We can no longer assume that because one lives within a particular parish boundary that one is a participant in the community of faith that gathers and prays in that sacred space. In that sense my question about Sunday is one of awareness and understanding of the place of the sacred/spiritual in our personal lives, on our family, in society.



Sunday Dimension

The commandment directs us to “keep holy the Sabbath day”. This commandment has been understood in different ways across the ages. In our own not so distant experience people were directed not to engage in servile work on Sunday. That clearly no longer applies in the lives of those who are required to work on Sundays. Many stores exploit the “rest” dimension to do additional business. Sports organisations generally expect participants to be available on Sunday morning. The impact of these developments over time has been to normalize as recreation time that once had a dedicated spiritual dimension. The



resultant tendency is that the *Sunday Dimension* is no longer part of the spiritual formation and nourishment in the lives of a new generation. This has led to the loss of Christian memory.

This new reality impacts on all our lives

from the infants to the old. However, a special responsibility rests on parents as guides and mentors to their children. The young need and desire direction and care. Parents are in a unique position to help the young to develop skills and insights to make solid and good choices, to sow seeds of the deeper spiritual values and to form their unique strength of character and identity. In doing so we can be confident of a new leadership rooted in a Christian vision of humanity as embodied in the life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Schools, Ethos and the Gospel

We are blessed in our schools. Our Catholic schools are an integral partner in nurturing the *Sunday Dimension* of the spiritual and sacred in our young people. There is ample evidence of their competence and accomplishments in the service of our young people. All the general curricular documents express a holistic vision of education that encompasses the development of the moral and spiritual dimension of the student. Many schools find it difficult to fulfill this obligation. This is not necessarily the fault of

individual teachers or indeed principal teachers. Schools are themselves strained with the demand to include evermore issues in an already crowded school timetable. A considerable amount of this pressure is coming from the Department of Education and Skills who are imposing what is in effect a State sponsored liberal secular vision of education which is contrary to the Catholic ethos. It is a thinly disguised project in social engineering. The unfortunate reality is that many of these impositions in the curriculum are being imposed without adequate consultation with the key stakeholders namely parents, teachers and patrons.

Our schools are meant to support parents and guardians in inculcating Christian values and virtues in the hearts of their child. Parents do not wish to leave their children adrift in a sea of relativism where opinion rather than principle determines what is deemed to be true. Our sacramental occasions of 1st Communion and Confirmation are more than cultural rites of passage. They mark key moments of celebration of the young persons individual spiritual journey into their life in Christ Jesus. It is this central relationship of faith, trust and love that is the well from which we drink deeply for spiritual sustenance.



So "What are we doing on Sunday" is a question worth considering this Lent. Unless we make space in our hearts/minds for the sacred and things beyond what "the eye can see" we risk missing out on the priceless experience of silence and reverence.

- * What do we revere and value in life?
- * To whose voices do you pay attention?
- * Where is the community of faith, the Church on that path?
- * How much do you care for those who are poor and powerless?
- * And what of our "common home" the Earth?

In a time of turbulence in the Church and the world it is a joy and challenge to walk humbly and gracefully through life.

+ William Cleary