

Sunday and Sundays

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Sunday is our weekly feast, the foundational celebration of the Christian church year. Sunday is the first day of the week, *mi-ya-shapat* (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1), the day Jesus rose from the dead. It is “the day of the Lord” (*deroonee / deroonagan*). The word *geeragee* (Sunday) comes from the Greek *Kyriakee*, meaning **dominical**, royal. For us, it is the day of assembly, not a lazy day or a rest day, a day of gathering for the celebration of *Soorp Badarak*, a day of meeting for corporate worship. But what is this Sunday worship all about? What are we celebrating? And what about all these special Sundays, like, Easter, Pentecost, Transfiguration, and other dominical festivals? How is one Sunday, any Sunday, related to other Sundays in our Church year? A brief reflection.

One of the few places in the Bible where the “Lord’s day” is mentioned in conjunction with worship is in the Book of Revelation. At the very beginning of the book we read—“I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write in a book what you see...’” (Revelation 1:10-11). Then, still in the same vision, in chapters 4 and 5, John paints a majestic picture of worship taking place in heaven. I want to draw your attention to a few verses:

“And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, ‘You are **worthy**, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, **for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.**’” (Revelation 4:9-11)

In chapter five, worship is offered to the “Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered”:

“You are **worthy** to take the scroll and to open its seals, **for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.**” (Revelation 5:9-10)

And, in Revelation 5:12, we read myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of angels sing:

“**Worthy** is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

Without getting into details, in Revelation 4 and 5, John is depicting worship that is going on *now*, in heaven, in God’s domain, not something that is going to take place at the end of times. The other thing we should note is that worship—from Old English means to acknowledge the worth of someone—has to do with honoring and praising someone who is worthy. And the worth of someone (or a group, an institution, or a nation) is measured by who that person is and what that person does or has done. Hence, in honoring or praising someone, we highlight that person’s virtues and accomplishments. This is what we read in Revelation 4 and 5 (see my highlights in the text). In Chapter 4, God is worshipped because he is the creator God, he is the sovereign God. And in chapter 5, Jesus is worshipped, because he is the Messiah, the King, who through his

sacrificial death has redeemed us. Christian worship entails celebrating and praising *who* God is and *what* he has done for us in and through his Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it is something that is happening in God's domain, and every creature is invited to join in this worship celebration (Revelation 5:13).

How do we do that? Well, we do that by telling the story of God through hymns and prayers, long and short, reciting and praising God's marvelous and mighty deeds, in a thousand different ways. This is what we do every Sunday during the Divine Liturgy (*Soorp Badarak*), which is the central act of worship of the Armenian Church.

Although those hymns and prayers are derived from the Bible, however, to do justice to Christian celebratory worship, we recount God's saving acts directly from the Bible itself, the only book that tells the official story of God. So on a given Sunday worship, we read two or three passages—one from the Old Testament, another from the epistles, and the final and the climactic reading is always from one of the gospels.

The story of God, of course, extends from Genesis to Revelation, from creation to new creation. That long biblical story reaches its climax in the person and works of Jesus the Messiah—by his coming into this world, his kingdom of God campaign—his healings and teachings and celebrations, but supremely through his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, and by his ascension to heaven, and by the sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The story ends when Christ returns to establish the kingdom of God on earth as it is already in heaven.

Because of that, the focus of the church's worship is Jesus the Messiah, our Lord and our Savior—not as he was 2000 years ago, but as he is now, risen and glorified, seated at the right hand of God, worshiped and praised by myriads of myriads of angels. This worship is taking place eternally in God's dimension, in heaven, a worship to which we—the church, as members of Christ's body by virtue of faith and baptism into Christ—are invited and privileged to join in. As indeed we do join in this heavenly liturgy in and through the celebration of *Soorp Badarak*. We join the heavenly chorus in singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3 and *Soorp Badarak*). And towards the end of the *Badarak* we thank Christ for having fed us from *his* table, distributing his body and blood for the salvation of the world, which is a foretaste of the banquet of the Kingdom of God to come. Those examples can be multiplied.

This is what we are celebrating every Sunday, every Lord's day, throughout the church year. But at different times during the year, while keeping the big narrative in perspective, in rehearsing the saving deeds of God through Christ, the spotlight moves and shines on this or that aspect of the life and redemptive work of Jesus. For instance at Christmas, we are not celebrating the baby Jesus, although in telling God's story we commemorate his coming into this world as the incarnate Lord. Likewise, at Easter we are not merely commemorating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is here that the Sunday Bible readings go hand in hand with the church calendar, where the readings, as integral and necessary part of celebratory worship, highlight and emphasize various facets and events of Jesus Christ. So every Sunday, every Lord's day, we are celebrating and worshipping the crucified but risen Jesus the Messiah, as he is *now* on his throne, as the Lord and king of the world.

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