



Vigil or Anticipated Mass

NORMALLY THE liturgical day runs from midnight to midnight, but on Sundays and solemnities it begins on the evening of the previous day. Parishes commonly offer a “Sunday” Mass on Saturday evening. Some call this an “anticipated Mass,” though the official liturgical texts never do. The Mass that evening is not anticipating Sunday. It is a celebration of Sunday.

A “Vigil Mass,” to be precise, refers to something else. On some solemnities, the Lectionary offers separate readings and the Missal offers separate prayers for a Vigil the evening before. These texts in a sense do “anticipate” the next day. For example, the Collect for the Christmas Vigil includes the phrase, “as we wait in hope for our redemption;” the antiphons say, “Today you will know that the Lord will come” and “The glory of the Lord will be revealed.” The Gospel for the Pentecost Vigil explicitly states, “There was no Spirit yet,” and the account of Pentecost from Acts of the Apostles is not proclaimed until the next day. When the faithful hear these words at a Vigil, they are fulfilling their canonical obligation to participate at Mass, but the texts envision that they will gather again the next day to hear the primary readings and prayers. Few do.

Pope John Paul II wrote about Saturday evening celebrations in *Dies Domini*: “the liturgy of what is sometimes called the ‘Vigil Mass’ is in effect the ‘festive’ Mass of Sunday” (49). He used the expression “Vigil Mass” more broadly than the liturgical calendar does. These days have Vigil Masses in the Missal: Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, and the Assumption of Mary. The lectionary for Easter and Pentecost includes a sequence, but only for the Mass of the day, not for the Vigil.