

Why can Catholics go to church on Saturday night and it counts as going on Sunday?

We reflect on the events of Good Friday and remember that scripture tells us that they had to hurry to place Jesus in the tomb because: *“It was the day of preparation, and the Sabbath was about to begin.”* (Luke 23:54) The Jewish Sabbath began at sunset of the prior evening. In Leviticus we read that God told Moses: *“[Y]ou shall keep this Sabbath of yours from evening to evening.”* (Lev. 23:32) At that time in history, evening was considered the beginning of a new day. Without a clock, there was no clear way to establish the occurrence of midnight, but the appearance of stars was very evident, and could be recognized by all the people.

Some of this tradition has carried over to our celebration of the Lord’s Day. We start celebrating Sunday on Saturday evening but also continue on through Sunday evening. In the Church’s Liturgy of the Hours, or Christian Prayer, there is normally a set of prayer for the morning and evening of each day of the week. But on Sunday there are two evening prayers; we have Evening Prayer I on Saturday and Evening Prayer II on Sunday. The Lord’s Day is certainly a reason for celebration, and we extend it as long as possible.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church indicates the acceptability of attending Mass on Saturday evening when it references Canon Law. It states: *“The precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: ‘On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass. The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day.’”* (CCC #2180)

We obviously begin our Saturday evening Masses prior to sunset. The local bishop has the responsibility to determine the time at which Masses can begin.

Deacon Joe