

Keeping the Lord's Day Holy

“Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. In six days, the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.” (Ex 20:8-12)

For the Israelites living in a pagan world, observing the third commandment to keep holy the sabbath gave them an identity that set them apart from the rest of the world. It helped them to maintain their steadfast love and faith in God.

Jesus said “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Mt. 5.17). For Christians, Sunday, the day of the Lord's Resurrection, replaces the sabbath in its ceremonial observance. By the celebration of the Pascal Mystery of Christ in the liturgy on Sunday, we fulfill the moral command of the Old Covenant. Keeping holy the Lord's Day can help us maintain our identity as Christians in a post-Christian world, as it did for the chosen people in their time. It is the way we live out our Christian vocation, and the way we grow in love and faithfulness to Christ and His Church.

Lumen Gentium says the Mass is the source and summit of the Christian life. Yet, some statistics report as few as twenty percent of Catholics attend Mass regularly. That means there are an awful lot of Catholics who don't think Mass attendance is obligatory or worse, that the Mass is of no benefit to them.

St. John Vianney said “There is nothing so great as the Eucharist. If God had something more precious, He would have given it to us.” The Eucharist calls us to memorialize Christ's passion and death on the Cross. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: “This is my body which is given for you,” and “This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood”. At Mass, Jesus is really, truly and substantially present in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus said

“If you do not eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you.” (John 6:53) Holy Communion is necessary to sustain the life of grace in us.

Jesus also said “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) After God created the world, He rested in order to set an example for us. Our Lord knew we needed time to refresh and recharge both spiritually and physically.

So how do we make Sunday a day of rest? We need to refrain from all unnecessary work. If you’re not doing this already, it takes some thought and planning. Obviously, certain occupations like medical professionals and first responders may be required to work on Sundays. And certain family obligations must be met (someone has to prepare the meals!). But with some self-reflection, careful planning and some effort, we can rearrange our trips to the market, doing laundry, or mowing the lawn, to another day of the week. (However, doing these things to help out an elderly neighbor is an act of charity.) Voltaire, an enemy of the Church who lived in the 18th century, once said “If you want to kill Christianity, you must abolish Sunday.” It seems that many in our society have certainly tried to do just that. The number of retail stores and restaurants opened on Sunday is but one example. And we may be contributing to this in our own way if we have been treating Sunday just as another ordinary day of the week. The Catechism of the Catholic Church urges us to make Sunday a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money (CCC 2172).

It is time that we Christians took back Sunday. Let us set aside one day of the week to render to God the worship He deserves. Let us spend more time in nurturing our prayer life by spending time in adoration, reading Holy Scripture or other spiritual reading. Let us put some effort into keeping our faith vibrant and moving it to a deeper level. In the words of Pope St. John Paul II “Let us be generous in our time in going to meet our Lord in worship and adoration.” And let us embrace the advice of the Catechism of the Catholic Church to be generous in helping everyone enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social and religious lives. (CCC 2184)

“This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Ps 118:24)