

March 7, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this Third Sunday of Lent, the Church, in calling us to repentance, invites us to a renewed faithfulness in living out His commandments. We hear from the book of Exodus from the Lord who gives His Ten Commandments to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai. Interestingly, the Lord gives a longer explanation of the first commandments that have to do with the love of God. The main point is that we should give God honor, respect, and attention, above all else, because without His Life and Love we would not exist! The Lord gives specific instruction on how and why He wishes a day to be set aside for His glory and for our rest.

In our time, many people and our entire society have lost the sense of keeping the Lord's Day Holy. God put this particular commandment in the first grouping of His commandments to show that He must be made first priority in our lives and everything else will fall into place. For us Christians, we are called to keep the Lord's Day holy because, in creation, God "rested" on the seventh day. In the new creation, the new-made human person, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead. If we have been given the life of salvation and grace by the power of His Resurrection, we are called to give thanks to God on "the 8th Day," the "New Sabbath," which is Sunday, "the Lord's Day". From the beginning of the Church, Christians understood that the original Sabbath had been transferred by the power of Jesus' Resurrection to Sunday.

We hear God's Ten Commandments in this week's first reading:

In those days, God delivered all these commandments:
"I, the LORD am your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.
You shall not have other gods besides me.
You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain.
For the LORD will not leave unpunished
the one who takes his name in vain.

**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.**

Honor your father and your mother,
that you may have a long life in the land
which the Lord, your God, is giving you.
You shall not kill.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife,
nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass,
nor anything else that belongs to him." *Exodus 20: 1-3, 7-11, 12-17*

In the Gospel passage, we hear of Jesus turning over the tables of merchants in the Temple. The Temple was supposed to be a place set aside and made holy for the worship of God and not like any other place on earth. Business and the things of every day life were supposed to be done in other places at other times, but not there. The people were losing the sense of the sacred and that they needed to set aside the other parts of life for the worship of God when in the Temple. God calls us in justice to worship Him and give thanks. Because He gave us everything we have, we need to give something back to Him, to focus on Him with special times and places devoted to Him alone. The Lord's Day (Sunday or the New Sabbath) is meant to be a Temple of God's Presence carved out of time to be set aside for His glory and our thanksgiving and refreshment. If Sunday has been filled-in with a lot of other things, we are called to carve out the unnecessary things in our lives to make time for God, others, and ourselves on Sunday.

In our time, setting aside Sunday, making a sacred time for God, has been forgotten. Does God need to overturn certain habits in our failure to keep Sundays and Holy Days truly holy? Do we really set aside time for God on those days or do Sundays and Holy Days look just like every other day of the week for us?

Jesus has a wake-up call for a world that struggles with giving up space and time for God and the sacred in today's Gospel:

"Since the Passover of the Jews was near,
Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves,
as well as the money changers seated there.
He made a whip out of cords
and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen,
and spilled the coins of the money changers
and overturned their tables,
and to those who sold doves he said,
"Take these out of here,
and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."
His disciples recalled the words of Scripture,
Zeal for your house will consume me." John 2:13-17

If Jesus were to walk into Meijer or any other retail store in our day, on a Sunday, He might just say "Get out of here! All of you are missing out on the rest, peace, recreation, family time, and worship time that every human needs to be rejuvenated in my love and grace. Stop being robots moving from one task to another and be human! Keep the Sabbath worship and rest! The Sabbath rest was made for you!"

This Lent, maybe Jesus wants to turn over the tables of your life and the routine of your family to get back to a real keeping of the Sabbath day. Does your Sunday look like every other day of the week or is it truly different? A Christian needs to evaluate the keeping of Sundays and Holy Days for God by incorporating the following elements in practical ways:

- 1) Rest - Setting aside every day business...is Sunday just a "catch-up day" for you and your family where other work simply replaces the weekday work or do you make a real effort to make the day different and plan for rest and refreshment? Whatever is a drudgery to you or others in your family should be avoided as much as possible. Doing absolutely necessary things like milking cows and changing diapers and acts of service for the good of others must be done, but everything else should be set aside and done on other days!
- 2) "Re-creation" - Doing things that restore us and make us new again because God made all things new by His Resurrection...is the recreation of your Sunday truly life-giving or is it just routine or self-centered?
- 3) Relaxation - Do I and my family experience a freedom from the drudgery of life on other days of the week by making Sunday sacred and different? Do we try to get all of the work we need to do at home or elsewhere finished on the other days of the week to be free on Sunday? Is Sunday just a "catch-up" day? Do I teach my

children to be constantly busy by having them participate in too many activities outside of home life so that both weekdays and weekends, especially Sunday, my family is divided and always running from one thing to another? This leads to burn-out and boredom with life eventually.

4) Relation - Sunday is meant to be a day for family and works of charity for others. Is my Sunday truly relational and life-giving for family, friends, and those in need? God made us for others and made others for us. Is Sunday a day of selfish isolation or focus on my own activities? Jesus spent His first day of Resurrection appearing to others to give them life. Do you? The day is also certainly a day for building my relationship with God through increased personal prayer and reflection (conversation with God).

5) Resurrection - The Risen Lord is truly present at Mass with us. Read Luke 24, the Road to Emmaus event. Do you make Sunday Mass the center of your life because the Risen Lord is the Lord of your life? Most of the early Christians would never think of missing the Eucharist. Apparently, there were some in the early Church who also did not understand the essential nature of worshiping with the rest of the Church on the Lord's Day at Mass and were not "in communion with Him" and ready for His second coming:

*Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have "a great priest over the house of God," let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy. We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. **We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.** Hebrews 10: 19-25*

Now, we can see why the Church, and our ancient Jewish ancestors in faith, have always considered it serious or mortal sin when we fail to keep the Lord's Day holy. For us Christians, to separate ourselves from Mass on Sundays (unless something serious prevents us) is to separate ourselves from Christ Himself. And if something serious has kept us away, as it has recently, we cannot fail to keep the Lord's Day holy in other ways. St. Paul urged a good discernment of being spiritually prepared to receive the Eucharist at Sunday Mass:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. If we discerned ourselves, we would not be under judgment; but since we are judged by [the] Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 1 Corinthians 11:26-32

How important it is to confess in the Sacrament of Reconciliation our failure to keep the Lord's Day holy in order to receive Christ in the Eucharist!

The only way to be refreshed and recreated in the image of God is to join with the Resurrected Lord through the Mass each Sunday. We become one with God through the "veil" of Christ's flesh which is Holy Communion. Holy Mass, Bible reading, and prayer (conversation with God) are at the heart of the Sunday rest: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28 and You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. St. Augustine, Confessions.* To be with the Lord on Sunday and Holy Days is to be at rest and renewed!

Pope St. John Paul II wrote a wonderful letter to all of us entitled, Dies Domini, "The Lord's Day," about the importance of keeping that day holy. We highly recommend it: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini.html He sent out that letter on the Feast of the Visitation in 1998. That was very intentional because Mary took the Presence of the Lord to St.

Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist. Mary gave Jesus to world and the Father continues to give us Jesus in the Mass each Sunday. He invites us and we visit Him on His day. Thank you, my Lord and my God, for visiting us on the day of your Resurrection each week at Holy Mass. May we never miss our chance to visit you each week!

Here is the opening section from that letter for your consideration:

1. The Lord's Day — as Sunday was called from Apostolic times(1) — has always been accorded special attention in the history of the Church because of its close connection with the very core of the Christian mystery. In fact, in the weekly reckoning of time, Sunday recalls the day of Christ's Resurrection. It is Easter which returns week by week, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, the fulfilment in him of the first creation and the dawn of "the new creation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). It is the day which recalls in grateful adoration the world's first day and looks forward in active hope to "the last day", when Christ will come in glory (cf. Acts 1:11; 1 Th 4:13-17) and all things will be made new (cf. Rev 21:5).

Rightly, then, the Psalmist's cry is applied to Sunday: "This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24). This invitation to joy, which the Easter liturgy makes its own, reflects the astonishment which came over the women who, having seen the crucifixion of Christ, found the tomb empty when they went there "very early on the first day after the Sabbath" (Mk 16:2). It is an invitation to relive in some way the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus, who felt their hearts "burn within them" as the Risen One walked with them on the road, explaining the Scriptures and revealing himself in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:32,35). And it echoes the joy — at first uncertain and then overwhelming — which the Apostles experienced on the evening of that same day, when they were visited by the Risen Jesus and received the gift of his peace and of his Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23).

May you have the peace of the Holy Spirit by keeping the Third Commandment: Keep Holy the Lord's Day. It is not easy in our time to keep this ancient tradition because there are many distractions. We have to choose the Day of Rest for ourselves and make it happen. If we get this part of our Faith right, everything else will fall into place. If God is first, you will have peace and joy! He promises!

In the Lord who gave us a Sabbath day's rest,
Fr. Derda, Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ & Deacon Ed