

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,
The third commandment is:

Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

This commandment reflects back to the beginning – to creation. God created the world in six days, and then on the seventh, He rested (Genesis 1). God then asks the Israelites to join in His “rest”. We see this as an act of faith and trust in God. Remember how God gave manna to the Israelites in the desert. He told them to gather only enough manna for each day. Those who tried to save overnight this miraculous bread from heaven found that the manna had gone rotten. However, on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much so that they would not have to work (gather manna) on the Sabbath. On that day only, the manna lasted. It was an act of trust in the Providence of God – that God provides for His people.

In the new dispensation, we celebrate not the seventh day as a Sabbath, but the *eighth day*. Wait! Eighth day? But there are only seven. True, but the day after the seventh (the 8th, or the 1st, Sunday) goes beyond the day of fulfillment of creation, but, by the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, it has become the day of *new creation*. (It is interesting to note that because of this, the octagon has a special place in church architecture – many baptismal fonts and ambos [pulpits] in older churches have 8 sides).

So how do we spend the Lord’s Day, the Day of Resurrection and New Creation, the new Christian Sabbath? The third commandment requires us to worship and to rest. From New Testament times, the Church has gathered to worship God and celebrate the Eucharist (Acts 2:42-46, I Cor 11:17, Heb 10:25). The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that

The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligations, unless excused for a serious reason.... Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin. (2181)

The Sunday Eucharist is foundational – the very grounding of our faith – and so everything must flow from that. We are called to spend time worshiping God on this holy day. As one saying goes, “God has given us 168 hours in a week; can we not give even *one* back to Him?” Can we not make one day holy for the Lord?

The other part of the commandment is *rest*. God made us, and He recognizes that *we need to rest*. Too often, we find that we don’t rest... and then we find ourselves run ragged and exhausted. This is a day of rest. Like the ancient Israelites, it is also a call to trust in God. Can we trust God to provide for us if we give Him this one day? Can we refrain from working (and making others have to work), and trust that God will still provide for us? (The Church, of course, recognizes that there are some professions that need to be done on Sundays – such as in the medical field or safety personnel.) Can we rest? Even when we’re not at our jobs, do we avoid unnecessary labor on Sundays? It is a day to be spent with God and with our loved ones.

In my life, obviously my vocation requires “work” on Sundays – I must celebrate Mass, and sometimes teach in Faith Life or other things. However, I have made an effort to avoid the unnecessary – for instance, on Sundays I try to avoid checking e-mails and scheduling meetings that can happen on other days.

I invite you to look at Sunday. Do you make it holy? Is it a day of worship, a day of love – spent with God and loved ones – a day of rest?