

16. July 2021

## “On Sabbath Observance and Sunday Sacredness”

Mt 12:1-8

*'At that time Jesus went through the cornfields one Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath.' But he said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God and they ate the loaves of the offering although neither he nor his followers were permitted to eat them, but only the priests? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the Temple priests break the Sabbath without committing any fault? Now here, I tell you, is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of man is master of the Sabbat.'*

To this day, the Sabbath - the “Shabbat” - is of great importance to the Jewish people. It is for them a feast day, a family day, a day of thanksgiving, a day of rest, the special Day of the Lord, to be distinguished from the working days. What a wise institution of God, to take man out of his usual hustle and bustle and to remind him that the most important thing is not work, but to live in loving communion with the Lord!

In our Christian tradition, Sunday has taken the place of the Jewish “Sabbath”. The “Lord's Day” - as we call it - is also a little prelude to heaven, and on this day all work should really be avoided, in order to enter into the “Sabbath rest”, which is also so holy for believing Jews.

Unfortunately, we humans run the risk of overly legalistic interpretation of God's wise precepts, and thus fail to transcend their true meaning. That is why the Pharisees and scribes were repeatedly scandalised by Jesus' actions. The precept of the Sabbath is not, in the first instance, to keep certain rules, but to understand the meaning of this holy day. This is what the Lord criticises in an overly legalistic view of the Sabbath, but without in any way questioning the value of the Sabbath itself.

We Christians in many countries have to mourn the loss of Sunday rest, which deeply disrupts the spiritual order that God has given to mankind.

Let us remember the commandment God gave to His people:

*“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for Yahweh your God. You shall do no work that day, neither you nor your son nor your daughter nor your servants, men or women, nor your animals nor the alien living with you. For in six days Yahweh made the heavens, earth and sea and all that these contain, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why Yahweh has blessed the Sabbath day and made it sacred.” (Ex 20:8-11)*

In the apparitions of La Salette in 1846, approved by the Church, the Virgin Mary also laments the non-observance of Sunday: “People do not observe the Lord's Day, they continue to work without stopping on Sundays”, says Our Lady, and she names this as one of the things that displease God very much and make the “hand of his Son” heavier and heavier...

The sanctification of Sunday means not to do unnecessary work, not to consider it as if it were just another day of the week and not to do anything that is contrary to the dignity of this day, for it is the Lord's Day.

If the Church reminds us that Sunday has been particularly sanctified by God, this serves to ensure something important in the rhythm of human life.

Sunday also reminds us of the contemplative dimension of our life. We are not only to glorify God with our active life; but there is also the intimate relationship of love with Him, the resting in His Heart, putting everything aside to be with Him. Sunday rest, explicitly addressing ourselves to God, attending Holy Mass, taking time for acts of charity for one's neighbour or for one's own soul in inner recollection. All this makes us receptive to God and corresponds to the spirit of the Sunday precept.

In this way the Lord's Day is sanctified and God is honoured. If, on the other hand, I simply continue with my normal occupations, if I do not respect this day in a special way, I am doing myself harm and rejecting what God wants to give me with the Day of Rest, for He also rested from all His works (*cf. Gen 2:3*). I would then be rejecting His offer of love and also violating those instructions that He has given me for my own good.

Although in the present time sensitivity to this day of rest is being lost, we Christians must bear witness that the Wisdom of God rules this world, and in this Wisdom is included the observance of the Lord's Day.