

Ten After Ten Session 103: The Third Commandment

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.”

2168 The third commandment of the Decalogue recalls the holiness of the sabbath: “The seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD.”

2169 In speaking of the sabbath Scripture recalls creation: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

2170 Scripture also reveals in the Lord’s day a memorial of Israel’s liberation from bondage in Egypt.

2171 God entrusted the sabbath to Israel to keep as a sign of the irrevocable covenant. The sabbath is for the Lord, holy and set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on behalf of Israel.

2172 God’s action is the model for human action. If God “rested and was refreshed” on the seventh day, man too ought to “rest” and should let others, especially the poor, “be refreshed.” The sabbath brings everyday work to a halt and provides a respite. It is a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money.

2173 The Gospel reports many incidents when Jesus was accused of violating the sabbath law. But Jesus never fails to respect the holiness of this day. He gives this law its authentic and authoritative interpretation.

2174 Jesus rose from the dead “on the first day of the week.” Because it is the “first day,” the day of Christ’s Resurrection recalls the first creation. Because it is the “eighth day” following the sabbath, it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by Christ’s Resurrection. For Christians it has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord’s Day—Sunday.

2175 Sunday is expressly distinguished from the sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the sabbath. In Christ’s Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish sabbath and announces man’s eternal rest in God.

2176 The celebration of Sunday observes the moral commandment inscribed by nature in the human heart to render to God an outward, visible, public, and regular worship as a sign of his universal beneficence to all. Sunday worship fulfills the moral command of the Old Covenant.

2177 The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life. Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church.

Also to be observed are the day of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Epiphany, the Ascension of Christ, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christi, the feast of Mary the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, the feast of Saint Joseph, the feast of the Apostles Saints Peter and Paul, and the feast of All Saints.

2178 This practice of the Christian assembly dates from the beginnings of the apostolic age. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds the faithful “not to neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but to encourage one another.”

Tradition preserves the memory of an ever-timely exhortation: Come to Church early, approach the Lord, and confess your sins, repent in prayer.... Be present at the sacred and divine liturgy, conclude its prayer and do not leave before the dismissal.

2179 A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

2180 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.

2181 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 obligation, unless excused for a serious reason... Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.

2182 Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity.

2184 Just as God “rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done,” human life has a rhythm of work and rest. The institution of the Lord’s Day helps everyone enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious lives.

2185 On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord’s Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body.

2186 Those Christians who have leisure should be mindful of their brethren who have the same needs and the same rights, yet cannot rest from work because of poverty and misery. Sunday is traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to good works and humble service of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week.

2187 Sanctifying Sundays and holy days requires a common effort. Every Christian should avoid making unnecessary demands on others that would hinder them from observing the Lord’s Day.

2188 In respecting religious liberty and the common good of all, Christians should seek recognition of Sundays and the Church’s holy days as legal holidays. They have to give everyone a public example of prayer, respect, and joy and defend their traditions as a precious contribution to the spiritual life of society.