

SERMON 923

The Third Sunday in Lent

988th Week as Priest

815th Week at St Dunstan's

80th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

HONOR THE SABBATH

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

What is the one most commonly broken commandment?

No, it's not, "Thou shalt do no murder," or, "Thou shalt not steal." It isn't, "Honor thy father and thy mother," or, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," although family relationships could be improved significantly by more respect and more loyalty among families everywhere.

No, the most commonly broken of the Ten Commandments is the fourth commandment ...

"Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." This one is broken by practically everybody every week of every year of their lives. And the rejection of this Commandment (notice that it is a "commandment" from God, not a "suggestion") is accomplished without much

fanfare or even recognition. In fact, in our own society, taking a Sabbath is somewhat frowned upon, since it is considered laziness or idleness.

No, we honor the Puritan work ethic, increased productivity, superstores that are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and an ever-increasing return on investment—but we do not honor a day of rest, a full day of rest, a day each week when you shall not do any work—you, your household, your business, or anyone visiting or staying with you.

I'm not sure we know *how* to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. Those of us who actually take a day off from work find ourselves cutting the grass, working in the garden, washing clothes, cleaning the house, or any of a myriad of chores, hobbies, and pastimes that we pass off as “relaxation.”

The real truth is that most of us just can't sit still, can't not work, can't rest—and certainly can't observe a full day of rest. We make excuses, we rationalize, we busy ourselves with golf, tennis, shopping, washing the car, driving that car somewhere to see something, do something, anything so long as we don't have to sit at home and *do nothing, for heaven's sake!*

In the early 1950s, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote a splendid little book entitled, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning For Modern Man*. You can order it on amazon.com for less than ten dollars used.

The Sabbath is a celebration of the day of rest which was given to us by God as a free gift. The Sabbath is not a burden, says Rabbi Heschel. The Sabbath is a joy and a sanctification of time. The Sabbath is God's time, but it is also our time, a time to rest and relax, a time to reflect and take a nap, a time to sit in the quiet with no telephone, no television, no internet or Facebook, no music but the sounds of the natural world.

Rabbi Heschel said, "He who wants enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life.

He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man."

The Sabbath can be observed and kept holy whether you live in the middle of the city or on a farm. The Sabbath can be observed from sundown to sundown, or

dawn to the next day. You can observe your day of rest on Saturday, or Sunday, or any day of the week for that matter. My Sabbath day is Monday, when everyone else is back at work and too busy or too preoccupied to be worried about church.

Please understand. I violated the fourth commandment for years, for at least 20 years of work, and probably more. But in the last 20 years I have come to appreciate the Sabbath as a day of rest, and I have learned much about the importance of keeping it holy. Bishop Parsley told me about the Sabbath in 1996, and Father Tim Holder gave me Rabbi Heschel's book in 1997. Since then, I've been doing my best to rest on Mondays. But it's hard, and it takes practice.

Holy Scripture is serious about the Sabbath. In the Torah a man is stoned to death for picking up stones on the Sabbath. "The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul," said the psalmist. "The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart." God is not kidding about this fourth commandment. It is good for us, necessary for us, essential for healthy and abundant living.

The Book of Genesis gives us the best example of a day of rest after God's first work—the Creation.

After six full days of work, God rested on the seventh day, and said that it was all very good.

At its best, over time, week after week after week, your Sabbath will become more and more important to you. It will be a day of rest and relaxation, but it will also be a time to recharge your batteries and revitalize your daily life. It will become a day of peace and a day of prayer. It will deepen your relationship with the God of all Creation, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It will become the rudder of your week and the pleasure of your soul. If you will learn to observe the Sabbath, it will enrich your life, your physical health, your mental health, and your relationships immeasurably. “More to be desired than gold,” said the psalmist, “more than much fine gold.”

This will require some effort on your part, and probably some measure of planning ahead. However, I want to urge you, this week, to take a day of rest. Just try it. See if you can rest. See if you can enjoy God’s blessing, God’s gift of the Sabbath.

Here’s how it works for me. On my Sabbath day, I wake up without an alarm. Make some coffee. Sit in the living room with the sun streaming through the windows. Read Morning Prayer or the Forward Day-by-

Day. Don't turn on the television. Sit in the most comfortable chair in your house or apartment and just sit. Read a book. Have another cup of coffee. Have a simple breakfast. Brush Nick and Rosie. Take a nap. Take a shower. Take a walk on the farm with Nick and Rosie. Have a simple lunch. Take another nap. Read a book. Just sit for a while. Close your eyes. Pray. Have a cup of hot tea. Listen to Mozart or Mendelssohn. Have supper with friends. Go to bed early. It is God's gift. God's commandment, to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.

If I could get you to do one thing as Christian people, it would be to honor the Sabbath. It will change your life. **AMEN.**