

The Third Commandment

“We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.” These were the brave words of one of seven sons of Saint Shamooni who were tortured to death because they refused to eat pork. The context of this bravery? In the second century before Christ, the Greeks conquered the Holy Land. One of their kings tried to do away with the Jewish religion. He ordered the Jewish people to disobey the laws that God had given them through Moses. Some obeyed him. Many others did not. True to their faith, they said words similar to what this brave man said, **“We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.”**

For these martyrs, seven sons and their mother, death was not the end. They believed in the Resurrection of the dead. As another one of these heroic brothers said to his torturers, **“It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the hope God gives of being raised up by him; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life.”**

“We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.” Is this something you and I can say? This seems like a good question to ask as we continue our series of homilies on the Ten Commandments. How important are they to us? Would we rather die than break them? If we loved God with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength, we would rather die than break any of the Ten Commandments.

Today we look at the Third Commandment. The Third Commandment is: **“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, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; 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.”**

The Third Commandment is sometimes abbreviated when teaching it, to be something like this: **“Remember to keep holy the LORD’s day.”**

The original Sabbath day was Saturday. It still is for the Jewish people. The day of rest for Moslems is Friday. For Christians, the Third Commandment applies to Sunday. That’s because Christ’s Resurrection, which happened on a Sunday, fulfills the spiritual meaning of the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus Christ is the One who brings us into eternal rest in God. The word “Sabbath” passed over into the term “The Lord’s Day” as Christian worship moved from Saturday to Sunday, the day our Lord rose from the dead. As St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote near the beginning of the second century, “Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath, but the Lord’s Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death.”

The Jewish Sabbath pointed toward Jesus, and the rest He invites us to enter into in union with Him. Jesus, as God, is also the authoritative interpreter of the Commandments, including the Third Commandment. As He said, referring to Himself, "**The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**" The authority of Jesus to interpret the Commandments has passed over into the Church. Or you could say that Jesus continues to interpret the Commandments through the Church.

So how does the Church interpret God's command to keep holy the LORD's day? Well, the Church tells us that on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or other activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body.

What are some ways we could have broken the Third Commandment? Let's ask ourselves some questions.

Did I miss Mass on a Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation with a **serious** reason? A serious reason could be being sick, taking care of someone who is sick, dangerous travel conditions, travel in a strange city the inability to find a Mass to go to,

being required by your employer to work so many hours on the weekend that you couldn't go to Mass, like on Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning *and* Sunday evening, or on the mornings and evenings of Holy Day of Obligation.

Reasons that I think are *not* good excuses to miss Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation are athletic events, hunting, being on vacation, having company, working when not required to that day, harvesting crops, being sleepy.

Daddy and Church

- Did I do unnecessary work on Sunday?
- Did I intentionally fail to fast or abstain from meat on the appointed days, like during Lent?
- Did I require employees to work on Sunday in non-essential occupations? Obviously some people have to work on Sundays for the good of society, like doctors, nurses, police officers, firemen, soldiers, priests and people who work in gas stations. But many businesses

could be closed on Sundays that aren't. If we own a business, let's set a good example for others.

- Have I failed to keep Sunday as a day for family and recreation?
- Have I allowed sports or other schedules to dictate my Sunday schedule?
- Have I been irreverent in church?
- Have I intentionally not paid attention at Mass, or not participated in the responses?
- Have I come in late to Mass or left early without a serious reason?
- Have I polluted the day by taking part in sinful amusements, hanging out with people who are a bad influence on me, or watching inappropriate entertainment?
- Have I made unnecessary demands on others that hindered them from observing the Lord's Day?
- Keeping Holy the Lord's Day is a way for us to give back to God for His incredible love for us. What does it mean to keep it holy? It means to set it apart for God's purposes.

□ Are our Sundays set apart for God's purposes? Is Sunday truly the Lord's Day for us? Do we love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength? Do we believe in the Resurrection? If we do, then we can say with that Jewish hero who resisted the unjust demands of the pagan king, "**We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.**"

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