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SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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The Ten Commandments! Far too many Christians view them as impossible imperatives and even burdensome. Jesus shows us the Ten Commandments talk about God's redemptive acts of love and compassion for his people throughout history.

Case in point: The Fourth Commandment: Observe the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. We first learn about the Sabbath in the Book of Genesis...God worked for six days and then rested on the seventh day. According to the Book of Exodus, God commanded his people to rest on the Sabbath and to keep it holy. The key word is *commanded*...not *suggested*. We too need a day to recover and get refreshed.

When I was a little boy and living in the small town of Hereford, Texas, "blue laws" kept all of the stores closed on Sunday. Blue laws were intended to encourage people to go church. We always went to church and most of my friends did...although they might not have gone to "my church". Few people worked on what is sometimes called the "Christian Sabbath".

Blue laws restricting work on Sunday still exist in certain parts of the United States. The town of Paramus, New Jersey, bans all secular work on Sunday except sales of food and gasoline. The exception to the "no work" rule...baseball games...they were OK on Sunday in that little town in Texas just as they are today...here and in Paramus, New Jersey.

The Pharisees had developed a complex set of rules and regulations about the Sabbath Day. The rules and regulations were legalistic and oppressive. They didn't teach people what the Sabbath Day was really about. They only served to satisfy the Pharisees inflated sense of importance and moral superiority.

Jesus makes it clear the Pharisees are wrong about the Sabbath. He asks them if it is OK to heal a sick person on the Sabbath. He then proceeds to heal the man with *dropsy*...what we today call *edema*. By healing the man Jesus shows compassion for a needy person must always take precedence over rigid self-serving observance of rules and regulations.

Saint Paul tells us in his First Letter to the Corinthians we must do things in a properly and orderly manner. Our historic Liturgy helps us do that...but even the words of the *Book of Common Prayer* cannot stand in the way of what brings us here in the first place...to experience God's love and mercy and show love and mercy to others.

The short parable Jesus tells about the wedding feast is not about making a run for best seat in the house and then being asked to move. Yes, that would be embarrassing. It's about humility. We show humility when we come before God as Psalm 51 says, "With a broken spirit and a contrite heart". Humility means being less self-centered and self-regarding. Humility brings with it its own reward.

What has all of this to do with observing the Sabbath Day and keeping it holy? We find the answer in Jesus' own words recorded in Mark's Gospel..."The Sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath".

God created the Sabbath Day for humankind and because Jesus is God's much loved Son and Lord of the Sabbath, he is free to do whatever he wishes on the Sabbath Day...even heal the man with edema. Jesus doesn't break the Ten Commandments...he shows their true meaning is more the a rigid interpretation of the words. The Sabbath is God's gift to humanity...not a burden.

We should always want to attend Sunday Mass. Many of us have secular jobs that keep us busy and unable to attend Sunday Mass. For many of us, work on Sunday is a matter of survival. God does not want us to lose our jobs, our homes or face starvation because we must work on Sundays. We do God's work even when we do our secular work...it too is a gift from God.

The Commandment says to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. When we do our work happily and without complaining whether it's on Saturday or Sunday or any other day of the week...when we help others...we honor God and are keeping the day holy.

