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SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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What exactly does it mean to keep the Sabbath Day holy? The Sabbath Day is Saturday...isn't it important only to Jews? Aren't we supposed to keep Sunday holy instead? Is there a connection between the Sabbath Day and Sunday?

If we look on Pages 68-69 in the *Book of Common Prayer* we'll find the *Decalogue*...the *Ten Commandments*...which we hear summarized at every Mass: Love God above all else and love others like we want to be loved. There is no opt-out clause for the Ten Commandments. They are God's moral laws and apply to us today.

The Fourth Commandment tells us to keep the Sabbath Day holy...and gives us a list of things we should refrain from doing on the Sabbath...like work. If we apply a literalistic interpretation to the Commandment...then we should do no work on Saturday...the Sabbath Day...but that is not what God intended when he said to keep the day holy.

Sunday is not the Christian Sabbath, although at one time most businesses stayed closed on Sunday...perhaps a well intentioned but misguided attempt to keep Sunday holy. One thing is certain about the "good-ole" days...people went to church. So what does it mean to keep the Sabbath...or Sunday...or any day...holy?

The religious authorities of Jesus' time obsessed over rules and regulations regarding what people could and could not do on the Sabbath Day. They had turned God's gift of the Sabbath Day...into an unhealthy worship of the day itself...and it was a worship based on fear God was going to get them if they did something wrong.

Jesus tells us in Mark's Gospel...the Sabbath Day was made for us...we weren't made for it. What about Sunday...many of us must work on Sunday to earn the money we need to pay the bills. Does working on Sunday offend God or violate his moral law. The answer is clearly no! But God does want us to put him first...then take care of our other obligations. There is wisdom in taking some time off from work...God did rest...so should we...it is the proper use of God's gift of time...to get recharged.

Jesus often healed people on the Sabbath Day...as he does in today's Gospel...but not before asking the lawyers and Pharisees if it was OK to heal someone on the Sabbath Day. Jesus knew what the lawyers and Pharisees were up to...he didn't give them a chance to ask the question. They knew better than to answer Jesus' question and risk making them selves look ridiculous...and so they wisely kept quiet.

The Gospel tells us the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely. He was having lunch with an important religious leader on the Sabbath Day. He got invited to lunch...not because everyone thought he was a nice guy and wanted to hear what he had to say...but because they intensely disliked him...and wanted to trick him into saying or doing something they could use against him.

The sick man in the Gospel had dropsy...what we call edema today. Jesus goes ahead and heals the man...and then asks the lawyers sitting with him if any of them would hesitate to pull their son out of a well on the Sabbath Day. The answer to the question is obviously no...which one of them would stand by and watch his son drown? And they all kept quiet...again.

Jesus then turns his attention to a lesson in humility...as he watches other lunch guests push each other out of the way to get a better seat at the table...closer to the host. At first glance the short story he tells about dinner guests appears to have little to do with the proper observance of the Sabbath Day...or any other day...but it does.

When we get invited to someone's house for dinner...don't be presumptuous and take the best seat at the table. It might have been reserved for someone more important than you...and your host might ask you to move to another seat...then think how embarrassed and humiliated you will be. Instead...take a less desirable seat...your host might ask you to take a better seat...then you will be the guest of honor.

Today's Gospel is all about compassion and humility...they are inextricably connected...they work together...they can't be pulled apart. Jesus did not let Sabbath Day rules and regulations stop him from healing the sick man with edema. He is God's Son...God gave us the Ten Commandments...God gave us the Sabbath Day...and he can do anything he wants on the Sabbath Day...and any other day...and he made them for us.

Saint Paul tells us we are to practice humility, be gentle and patient and be tolerant with one another. Our faith is not about obsession over rules and regulations or becoming overwhelmed with guilt because we have to work on Sunday.

We should become obsessed with showing compassion and humility...then we are keeping the Sabbath Day...and Sunday...and every other day of the week holy...as God intended.

