

ABOUT SUNDAY WORK

A priest's point of view

Over the years I've been privileged to live and labour as a priest of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has become apparent to me and perhaps increasingly to the faithful that priests work on the Lord's Day, on Sunday. We still live under the obligation to rest one day a week because for our good He wants us to enjoy abundant life, to "keep holy the Lord's Day"; that is, to rest and not to work or worry the whole day long, and to spend the day with our family and friends.

Since we priests labour on Sunday, we must transfer part of our Sunday obligation to rest and spend time with family on another day, preferably in connection with Sunday, such as on Monday or Saturday. Another issue touches all those who approach us on the Sunday – before or after Masses for example – with requests which require follow up later. Sunday is not a good day to approach our priests with anything requiring us to remember details later. We are ready to receive personal news, to hear penitents in the confessional, to offer the Anointing of the Sick on the spot, to simply pray particularly for someone or formulate a blessing. However, multiple encounters prevent efficient memory; so if anyone wants follow up, they would do better to get back to us during the week.

It's not because we don't care, but simply that since the matter is personal and important to the seeker, then their motivation about it will definitely cause them to remember it and so it makes sense that they take charge of the follow up. From the priests' point of view, there usually are several such conversations on Sunday, sometimes all in the space of just a few minutes. Some may be able to remember so many varied encounters that come in rapid succession, but I tend to forget most or all of them! In fact, I don't even remember who left an item with me unless it is labelled. My mind doesn't work like a computer where everything is on the desktop where I left it last time I was there.

Attempting to recover a lost memory of someone making a request or suggestion before or after Mass on Sunday can be a very tedious process. I must tell everyone not to try to "do business" or approach me regarding anything other than what is immediate, on Sunday before or after Masses. Though you may have a very clear memory of approaching me or another priest on a given Sunday; as generally happens, after Sunday is over, most priests have no recollection whatever of it.

It is very misleading for me to allow anyone to have the impression that what he or she may say to me on Sundays will be retained or that anything I say will be remembered or followed up on. I try to always say this, but can't always when they catch me between two other people or two duties, or with my mind full of personal and spiritual considerations of my own. It is best to seek particular services from priests by putting the request to them during the week through normal channels.

While it makes sense to try to accomplish practical matters during the week, the "divine renovation" approach to the Sunday Assembly can arrange in advance to provide a wider range of services on Sunday. A "Hospitality Desk" can be set up with one or more people ready to take note of specific requests, registrations for various activities and learning opportunities, and try to answer any number of questions that people might bring. Parish staff and volunteers could be formed to be the face and voice of the Church in rendering such a service in a way that creates opportunities for people to feel as though they are welcome and belong to the Parish faith community.

God's point of view – “You shall keep holy the Lord’s Day.” (Exodus 20:8, 31:14)

The Lord's Day belongs to Him; so we are not to conduct any kind of business on this day, meaning trying to make progress in our work activities, domestic tasks, or even Church work. Our entire and only preoccupation on this day is to give glory to God, to honor Him, to consider his Word and ponder it, to reflect on his ways and take to heart his Word and see how it may apply to our lives. It's a day for worship, spiritual renewal, community, family life, celebration, leisure, and rest.

God did not make this a command to tyrannize our lives, but only because we had forgotten how to live well. God doesn't want us to give Him back the “Lord’s Day” for his own benefit, but for ours. Only when we make sufficient room for God in our lives can He free us from the harmful effects of the tyranny of our own impulses, wants, desires, ambitions, fears, and needs.

We are to spend the whole day in the company of family and friends, to remember to love and be loved, to celebrate God and each other's lives. We can help each other enjoy solitude and silence, physical activity, and rest. We remember we are creatures and children of God, that life is brief, filled with beauty, goodness, and all God's good gifts, and that our eternal destiny is of great importance. We are, at least once a week, to enjoy being alive and remember why we are alive, how it is that our life is a gift, where we come from and where we are going.

A parishioner's point of view

From our human and personal point of view, the normal times, places, and means for carrying out Fabrique and Parish activity is during the week, when we have access to means to take notes and do whatever is needed to assure the proper follow up that may be required by each need or request. We can make special provision to assist the stranger and welcome those who come to the Sunday Assembly and orient them for later follow up without turning the day into a working ministry day.

I am deeply inspired and strongly challenged by the enthusiasm, talent, and generosity of the children of God. I deeply appreciate you and love you for the zeal you have for God, for his Church, and for his people. You and so many are doing so much and juggling so many duties that you share your ideas when you can for fear of forgetting them in the confusion of your relentless activity and the boiling thoughts of your very active mind and imagination. I understand that.

It remains a great challenge for us, who live in such a secularized and individualized culture and society, to obey the third commandment and give back to God the day that belongs to Him and not to us. We get so caught up in what we do and care about that we can actually forget or lose sight of the most important things, those that really matter for the good conduct of our lives and happiness, and those that really last. It is precisely for this reason that God has given this commandment.

God's solution to the threat and reality of our slavery to time is to give us time as a gift. We can actually receive time from God as a gift when we accept to give Him back the seventh day, the Sabbath. It's a hard challenge for us to do this. As we try to resist the frantic pace of society around us, it is as if we were paddling against the current. Every effort we expend to do this, to obey the Lord and honour Him, He will reward with the freedom of the children of God and renew the joy of our youth. He has promised, and He is faithful. Blessed be God, our Father, and Jesus our Lord.