

## SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

### THE SANCTIFICATION OF SUNDAYS AND HOLYDAYS.

*“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?” Luke 14 : 3.*

The Scribes and Pharisees censured the Infinite Wisdom and Goodness for giving health to the sick,—for performing an act of charity on the Sabbath, whilst they themselves did not hesitate a moment to rescue their domestic animals from danger, on that day. “Which of you,” said Jesus to these censors, “which of you whose ass or ox shall fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him out on the Sabbath day?—And they could not answer him to these things,” adds the Evangelist. Many of our modern Christians, on the contrary, go to the other extreme,—honoring the third commandment of God more (as has been pithily remarked) “in the breach than in the observance.” They work on Sundays and holydays without scruple,—nay, they even indulge in sinful pleasures, saying: “It is a holiday to-day; we may enjoy ourselves a little.” What a want of sense as well as of piety! As if it were lawful to do on Sundays and holydays what it would be sinful to do on week-days. To guard you, alike, against the error of the ancient Jews and the delusion of these modern Christians, I shall speak to-day of the sanctification of Sundays and holydays, and I shall endeavor to explain to you

- I. *What is to be avoided,* and
- II. *What is to be done on those days.*

#### I. *On Sundays and holydays*

- I. *All servile works are to be avoided.*

(a) Servile works are those laborious, corporal works which are usually done by servants, day-laborers, and artisans,—in a word, all those works which require the power of the body more than the faculties of the mind, or have for their object the temporal, not the eternal, welfare of man. The so-called fine arts, which occupy the mind more than the body, or which have the development of the understanding, or an innocent entertainment and mental relaxation for their object, are not servile works, and, consequently, are not forbidden on Sundays and holydays. Therefore, it is lawful on Sundays and holydays, to give instruction in art or science, to engage in study, or the arts of drawing, painting, or music, provided that



they do not captivate the mind too much, or do not hinder the performance of the Sunday duties.

There are, however, three cases in which even servile works are lawful on Sundays and holydays.

(b) *Where there is an absolute necessity.* Christ himself taught this; for when the Pharisees held their peace upon hearing the question: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?" he said to them: "Which of you, whose ox or ass shall fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him out on the Sabbath-day?" By these words, Jesus indicates that servile works done in case of urgent necessity, are not a profanation of the Sunday. Thus, it is lawful for the Fire Department to try to extinguish a fire if it should occur on that day. If there is a long spell of wet weather in harvest-time, the farmer is justified in gathering his crops whenever the weather is favorable, though it should be on a Sunday. A mother who has no time during the week, is allowed on Sunday to repair the clothing of the family, to knit, or even to weave. "It is better to dig all day, than to dance all day on festivals." (St. Augustine.)

(c) *When the work is done for the honor of God.* To this class of works belong those which refer chiefly and immediately to the service of God, such as the ringing of the bells, the working of the bellows of the organ, the adorning of the church and altars. That such works do not violate the third commandment of God is evident from the words which Christ addressed to the Pharisees when they took scandal at his disciples because they plucked and ate corn on the Sabbath-day. "Have you not read in the law how that, on the Sabbath-days, the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are without blame?" For it was the office of the Jewish priests to slaughter the animals offered in sacrifice to the Lord. (Matt. 12 : 5.)

(d) *When the love of our neighbor obliges us.* "What man shall there be among you," saith our divine Lord, "that hath one sheep; and if the same fall into a pit on the Sabbath-day, will he not take hold on it, and lift it up? How much better is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do a good deed on the Sabbath-day." (Matt. 12 : 11, 12.) You are, therefore, allowed to assist the sick, even though you should be obliged, in so doing, to omit Mass, for the *natural* law takes precedence of the *ecclesiastical*. The service of the sick is the service of God; we must leave God for God; and he regards every attention which we lavish upon his sick and suffering members as though offered to himself. "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." (Matt. 25 : 40.)

In the absence of any of these three dispensations, you would sin griev-



ously if you performed servile works on Sundays and holydays. We can doubt this so much the less because God forbade servile works in the Old Law under the penalty of death. (Exodus 31 : 4. According to the opinion of most theologians, we commit a mortal sin when we work four hours on Sundays and holydays, because that number of hours is a considerable part of the day. It does not, however, depend so much upon the *time* as upon the *quality* of the work done, and upon the aggravating circumstances, *i. e.*, whether it be done in a quiet or a boisterous way, and whether scandal be given by it or not. Even the most insignificant labor done in contempt of the divine or the ecclesiastical commandment would be a mortal sin.

2. *All sinful works are to be avoided on Sundays and holydays.*

(a) That which is sacred must be kept sacred. Hence, we must avoid with special care, on Sundays and holydays, whatever is evidently sinful. Sin is not permissible on any day ; but it is more abominable when committed on Sundays, and therefore more culpable, and deserving of greater punishment. The reason of this greater culpability consists in the fact that Sundays being especially dedicated to the service and worship of God, we must avoid sin with greater care on those days, and endeavor to do good with greater fervor. “ Is it not a great offence against God, and even a kind of sacrilege, to spend days particularly dedicated to the Lord, in the follies of the world and in vain pleasures ? ” (St. Cyril.) On this account, it is advisable that you mention in your confessions, the circumstance that you have sinned on Sundays and holydays ; for although the mentioning of it is not absolutely necessary, yet it is useful, that the confessor may better understand the grievousness of the sin, be able to enjoin a suitable penance, and prescribe the proper remedies.

(b) Alas ! it is on those days that most sins are committed. We may say, without the least exaggeration, that, in the whole six days of the week, there are not so many sins committed as on Sunday alone. To mention only a few sins, how many offend God by *pride* ! Many vain women go to church for no other purpose than to see and to be seen,—to display their fine clothes and elegant ornaments. They appear before the Blessed Sacrament, before the very altar of the Most High, arrayed in such brilliant,—nay, even bold and immodest attire, that it is evident they do not enter the church to adore God, but to gratify their passions. How many sin by *impurity* on the day of rest ! This abominable vice may be justly called (alas ! for the hateful truth !) a Sunday’s child. The salutary restraints of hard work and every-day labor, are relaxed ; there are pleasure-parties for the young on land and water. Human nature is weak, and human passions, strong ; and hence it comes to pass that most of the unchaste familiarities and dangerous intimacies which disgrace Christians,



are indulged in on Sundays. How many sins are committed on those days against *fraternal charity!* People sit idly on their door-steps or lounge at the open windows, and gossiping with the passers-by, tear to pieces, like vultures, the good name and fame of their neighbors. Thus it is that the devil has a rich harvest on Sundays and holydays, and many souls then become his wretched slaves.

## II. *What must we do on Sundays and holydays ?*

I. *We must attend Mass.* It is a strict precept of the Church to hear Mass on Sundays and holydays; but, besides the precept of the Church, the natural law obliges us; for we know by that law inscribed upon our hearts by the divine finger, that we should endeavor especially on the Lord's day, to honor God in the manner most pleasing to him. Now God, my dear brethren, is honored most perfectly by the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, for the Mass is the chief expression of our worship of God,—nay, the centre of the whole Christian religion. We must daily adore God, thank him for his benefits, ask his pardon for our sins, and petition for his graces and blessings. But where can we better comply with this duty than in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is the only and most sublime sacrifice of praise, of thanksgiving, of propitiation, and of petition?

In order, however, to satisfy the ecclesiastical law, we must be present with devotion.

(a) *At the whole Mass.* He who neglects, through his own fault, any part of the Mass, commits a mortal or a venial sin, according to the solemnity and importance of the part omitted. Some theologians declare it to be a mortal sin to come to a Mass of obligation after the *Offertory*, since the *Offertory* is one of the principal parts of the Mass. In like manner, some teach that he who departs from the holy Sacrifice before the communion of the priest, commits a mortal sin. Endeavor, therefore, always to be in time for Mass, and never leave the church until the priest has left the altar. According to an explanation of Pope Innocent XI., the obligation of hearing Mass on a Sunday or holyday is not fulfilled by him who hears two half-Masses of two different priests, no matter whether they are said simultaneously or consecutively.

(b) *We must assist with devotion at the holy Sacrifice.* In order to be made partakers of the fruits of grace, we must hear Mass devoutly. He who is indevout, although he may assist in person at the august Sacrifice, so far from obtaining grace, goes away empty-handed, and offends God. How unhappy, alas! are those lukewarm Christians who, instead of devoutly praying at Mass, entertain various distracting thoughts about temporal and even sinful objects,—who gaze around, laugh and talk, give themselves



to slothful rest, or sit during the whole Mass, although healthy and strong. St. Chrysostom, with grief, complains of such unseemly behavior at the divine service: "I see some standing and talking whilst the prayers are being said; they talk even whilst the priest is consecrating. Audacity and impertinence! Is it not a wonder that lightning does not descend, not only upon them, but upon us all?"

2. *We must strive to hear with zeal the word of God on Sundays and holydays.* Although the Church does not make the hearing of the word of God obligatory on her children on Sundays and holydays under pain of mortal sin,—although attendance at sermons and religious instructions is not a duty enforced as strictly as the hearing of Mass, no one should omit it through negligence, as the following reasons will convince you.

(a) Very few of the ordinary run of Christians possess so thorough a knowledge of their religion as to need no further instruction. A large proportion of Catholics, through poverty or adverse circumstances, have been neglected in their early training, and grow up to maturity wholly ignorant of the vital truths of faith. Even many of those who are counted among the learned, are often very shallow in their acquaintance with religious matters, and would be much embarrassed if they were obliged to answer even the simple questions of the Catechism. Some, again, through the influence of heretical or infidel associations, either consciously or unconsciously, hold erroneous opinions of which they will never be freed, unless they diligently listen to religious instructions.

(b) Since sermons have for their object not only to instruct, but also to amend and to perfect, all the faithful should make it a point to attend them, sinners as well as the just; the former, that they may amend their lives; the latter, that they may advance in virtue. And all should bring to the hearing of the Word of God such sincere and docile hearts that the parable of the seed that fell upon the good ground may be fully realized in them; for if their hearts be like the open wayside, the fowls of the air, *i. e.*, the devils, will come and devour the evangelical seed; and, if they be like the rock, it will have no roots, and in time of temptation, the believers will fall away; and if their hearts are filled with the thorns of this life's cares and riches, and pleasures, the Gospel seed will yield no fruit whatsoever. But the good and perfect heart, hearing the word, "shall keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience." (Luke 8 : 15.)

(c) Good example, also, comes into consideration, and superiors especially should edify their fellow-Christians, and, in a particular manner, their children and dependents, by the diligent and reverential hearing of



the Word of God ; for what scandal would they not give by seldom or never appearing at Christian instructions !

3. *We must also strive to assist at the afternoon service.* Many believe that with the divine service in the morning all is over,—that they have complied with their duty, and that the afternoon is theirs, to be employed entirely in seeking their own pleasure. This, however, is an erroneous idea, and cannot be reconciled with a thorough and faithful observance of the Sunday. A master would not be satisfied with that servant who would work only in the forenoon, and then take the afternoon to himself. In like manner, God will not be satisfied with us, if we dedicate to him only the first half of the Sundays and holydays, and claim the rest for ourselves ; it is his will that, with the exception of a few hours of needed recreation, we should spend the entire Sunday and holyday in his service. Hence, a good Christian, not satisfied with hearing Mass devoutly on the Lord's day, also visits the church in the afternoon, in order to assist at Vespers and the Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament. If circumstances, however, should render this impossible, he supplies the involuntary omission by praying, and reading devotional books at home.

4. *It is advisable on those days to receive the holy Sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist.* In the first centuries of the Church, it was the universal custom of the faithful to receive holy Communion on all Sundays during Mass. St. Justin, the martyr, tells us that holy Communion was sent to those Christians who, on account of sickness or some other obstacle, could not hear Mass. I do not, indeed, ask of you to go to confession and Communion on all Sundays and holydays, but I do exhort and advise you to go frequently during the year. It would not be too much for young people,—persons who are not married,—to go once a month ; for married people equally as often, or at least every three months, viz. : four times a year. A frequent reception of the holy Sacraments would contribute materially to the sanctification of the Sundays and holydays, and would put a stop to many sins which, as you well know, are committed on those days.

5. *Lastly, to perform works of charity, especially the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.* “Although we are forbidden on festival days to perform servile works, yet we are commanded to perform charitable works,” says the holy St. Irenæus. Pharisees, and those who are animated with a Pharisaical spirit, are the only ones who do not acknowledge this obligation ; they even consider the performance of such charitable deeds a profanation of the Sunday, although Christ and his Apostles performed their works of mercy especially on the Sabbath-day, as the holy Scripture informs us.



Many of you, during the week, have no time for the performance of works of charity, while Sundays and festival days afford much leisure for such works, by which the necessities of our neighbors are alleviated, and God is honored and glorified. Therefore St. James says : " Religion, pure and unspotted, with God and the Father, is this : to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep one's self undefiled from this world." (St. James 1 : 27.) In the primitive ages of Christianity, collections were made on Sundays for the relief of the poor and afflicted, and for many other charitable purposes. (1 Cor. 16 : 2.) These charitable collections, as you see, are of very ancient date ; they are as old as the Church. "The poor you will always have with you." Hence, do not complain of the number of collections, especially as we live in a country where the Church is entirely dependent on the contributions of the faithful. What you give to the Church and to the poor, you give to the Lord, and he is a rich rewarder. " Alms delivereth from death ; and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting." (Job 12 : 9.) The works of charity and mercy are a species of sacrifice which we offer to God, and by which we draw down upon us his favor and protection. For this reason, the Apostle writes : " Do not forget to do good, and to impart ; for by such sacrifices, God's favor is obtained." (Heb. 13 : 16.)

In conclusion, I exhort you most earnestly that, following the good example of the early Christians and practical Catholics of all times, you spend your Sundays and holydays in such a manner as to make them days of grace, blessing, and salvation. Shun the sins which are often committed on those days. Regularly attend the holy Mass in the morning, and Vespers and Benediction in the afternoon ; and always with attention and reverence. Hear the word of God with good and perfect hearts ; frequently during the year receive the holy Sacraments, read devotional books, shun worldly and sinful amusements, perform works of mercy and charity,—in short, observe the Sundays and festival days in such a manner that on your death-bed you can look back upon them with consolation, and may then hope to be called to the eternal joys of heaven, which they symbolize. So may be fulfilled in you the promise of the Lord : " Every one that keepeth the Sabbath from profaning it, and that holdeth fast my covenant, I will bring him into my holy mount." (Isaiah 56 : 6.) Amen.