

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- Keeping Sabbath
- Finding Rest and Recreation
- Taking Fallow Time

## Sabbath: A Day for Relaxing and Recharging by A. J. Wagner

There seems to be a renewed media interest in honoring the Sabbath. I recently heard a report on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* about Germany's crackdown on stores violating the "blue laws," those laws that forbid commerce on Sundays. A recent essay in the *Washington Post* challenged readers to cut out their Sunday work and sports leagues and use the day to revitalize themselves. *Sojourners* magazine also published recent reflections about those of us who ignore the third commandment. All these reports, all these pleas to slow down, and I still didn't.

Christ was criticized for performing miracles on the Sabbath. He challenged the Pharisees and the priests by reminding them that God doesn't take the Sabbath off and neither do they. Children are born on the Sabbath, people are healed on the Sabbath, priests work in the temple on the Sabbath. He challenged them to admit that if an animal fell in a pit on the Sabbath, they would pull it out.

So when I hear or read these reports, I justify my Sunday busyness in the name of the Beatitudes. I keep the day holy by attending mass and doing work for the good of the Kingdom—like writing for *HomeWord*.

Then last Sunday, when I was about to sit down to write this very essay you are reading, my wife told me that some friends were out of town and had left us the key to their

house so that we might spend the day swimming in their pool. She and my daughter were going, and they asked if I would come along. I whined that I had to get my writing done, but my wife reminded me that I could do it tomorrow. I hesitated, then agreed to go.

For more than two hours, the three of us lazily floated around our friends' backyard pool, talking about stuff like church, work, school, friends, family, and more. We relaxed. We recharged. We were a family enjoying one another's company. We were being holy.

In fact, we deem those few hours holier than the mass we attended that morning. We communed and solidified our relationship with one another and with God, for God was clearly present to each of us through each of us. What a Sunday!

It's Monday now, and I am finally writing this essay. What would I have written had I stayed home yesterday? Look at the first two paragraphs again. That is where I was headed. Now I am not so sure.

In her book *Practicing Our Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), Dorothy Bass reflects on what Jewish law teaches about what should and should not be done on *Shabbat*:

What should not be done is "work." . . . Work is whatever requires changing the natural, material world. All week long, human beings wrestle with the natural world, tilling and hammering and carrying and burning. On the Sabbath, however, Jews let it be. They celebrate it as it is and live in it in peace and gratitude. . . . What *should* be done? Specific religious duties do exist, including worship at synagogue and reading of the Torah. But the holiness of the Sabbath is also made manifest in the joy people expect to experience on that day. It is a good deed for married couples to have sexual intercourse on *Shabbat*. Taking a walk, resting, talking with loved ones, reading—these are good too. (pp. 80–81)

Further in her reflections, Bass makes the following profound statement: "To act as if the world cannot get along without our work for one day in seven is a startling display of pride that denies the sufficiency of our generous Maker" (p. 86).

# Honor the Sabbath . . . But How?

by Jean Buell

I remember one Sunday afternoon when we invited our priest over for dinner. As he settled into the sofa, he said: "This is so relaxing. After working Sunday mornings, I'm usually exhausted."

"Hmm," I said, "I never thought of it that way." Priests *work* on Sunday? I thought it was a time to *pray*! I guess that's because I'm at church for only one mass. I can imagine that presiding at four masses, delivering four homilies, and greeting four thousand parishioners would, in fact, be work.

As our conversation continued, the priest recalled childhood Sundays when his family gathered for elaborate dinners that his mom made. "I seldom make big dinners on Sundays," I said, "because that's work, and Sunday is my day to *play*."

"Hmm," he said, "I never thought of it that way."

Sunday is a day to pray and to play. It is a day to worship God, to eat doughnuts, to sip coffee, to read the paper, and to connect with family. It is a day with a pace that's different from every other day of the week. I, for one, feel better when my life includes a balance of work, rest, and play. Who but a loving God would prescribe that for all of us? The third commandment tells us to honor the Sabbath as a day of rest because God rested on the seventh day. The Christian tradition tells us to honor Sunday in the same way because Jesus rose on the first day of the week. Who but a capitalistic culture would ignore that?

Many people work on Sundays, including my husband. In our household Sunday cannot always be the family day I would like it to be. I struggle to help my children understand that Sunday is holy. In one feeble attempt, I posted their daily jobs on the refrigerator. For Sunday I wrote, "This is our day of rest." I thought they would be elated, but to

my surprise, they complained! They wanted to play on Saturdays and clean on Sundays. They had discovered their own rhythm of recreation. Could I rightfully revise it? Making Sunday a holy day is an ongoing struggle that leads me to the serenity prayer.

What I can control are my own attitudes and actions. So I role-model my beliefs. For example, I make weekend worship a priority. I view Sunday as my day of rest, and I encourage my family to do the same. I try to eliminate nonpressing household jobs and limit activities that divide our family unit.

What I can't control are personal preferences, practice schedules, and work schedules. So I adapt. Sometimes I ask my children what will make Sunday a holy day. Their answers impress me. They have suggested making pizza together or visiting their grandpa in the nursing home. Sometimes I simply remind them to be holy in whatever they do. When I have work that can't wait, I try to make it a labor of love. Because Sunday cannot always be our family day, we have designated Thursday night as our family night instead.

Ideally, Sunday should be set aside as a special day. Realistically, it often looks like any other day of the week. What if a Sunday attitude prevailed over those not-so-Sunday activities, then spilled over to similar activities during the week? What if weekdays

included Sunday activities of prayer and play? Perhaps that would give our lives a new sense of Sabbath balance. Hmm. Did you ever think about it that way?

In her best-selling book *Everyday Sacred*, Sue Bender uses the phrase *little Sabbaths* to describe pauses in the day.

"We all need a certain amount of fallow time.

. . .

"Watching the grass grow, sitting on the hillside, staring out the window daydreaming. When we don't have it, there is a deeper intelligence that won't come forth."

Mine is a racehorse rhythm, and once I get started in the morning it's difficult for me to stop. Now I can see that a pause—even a very *small pause*—is extremely useful.

These "little Sabbaths" replenish my body—and spirit. (In *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*, Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, editors, [New York: Scribner, 1996,] p. 257)

*HomeWord* is edited by Leif Kehrwald and is published monthly for parish bulletins and individual households by Family Faith-Life Resources of Saint Mary's Press.

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