

Tuesday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mk 2:23-28): As he was passing through a field of grain on the sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. At this the Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?” He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?” Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

“The sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”

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Today, as yesterday, Jesus has to contend with the Pharisees, who are distorting Moses' Law, by highlighting the letter of the law while ignoring the actual spirit of the Law. Indeed, the Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of violating the Sabbath (cf. Mk 2:24). According to their annoying arguments, to pick the heads of grain means “to reap”, while crushing them in their hands signifies “to thresh”: these agricultural tasks —and some forty others— were forbidden on the Sabbath, as a day of rest. As we already know, the bread of offering the Gospel speaks of, were twelve loaves of bread that were placed every week on the sanctuary table, as a tribute from the twelve tribes of Israel to their God and Lord.

Abiathar's attitude is the same one Jesus is teaching us today: The less important precepts of the Law have to give way to the most important ones; a ceremonial precept has to give way to a precept of the natural law; the precept of resting on the Sabbath should not, therefore, prevail over the basic needs of subsistence. The

Second Vatican Council was inspired by the previous example, and to underline that people have to prevail over economic and social questions, stated: “The social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person if the disposition of affairs is to be subordinate to the personal realm and not contrariwise, as the Lord indicated when He said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (cf. Mk 2:27).

Saint Augustine also said: “Love and do as you please.” Do we understand this saying, or do we allow lesser things to overrule the love we have to place on whatever we do? To work, forgive, correct, attend Mass on Sundays, take care of sick people, abide by the commandments... do we do these because we have to, or because of our love for God? May these considerations help us to revitalize all our deeds with the love our Lord has instilled in our hearts, precisely so that we can also love Him.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“Those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch)

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“Sabbath intends to participate in the rest and with the peace of God. But when man refuses the ‘leisure of God’ (worshipping) then he becomes a ‘business slave’.” (Benedict XVI)

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“Sunday is expressly distinguished from the sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the sabbath. In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish sabbath and announces man's eternal rest in God.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 2175)