Sunday 9th (B) in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mk* 2,23-3,6): One Sabbath Jesus was walking through grainfields. As his disciples walked along with him, they began to pick the heads of grain and crush them in their hands. Then the Pharisees said to Jesus, «Look! they are doing what is forbidden on the Sabbath!». And He said to them, «Have you never read what David did in his time of need, when he and his men were very hungry? He went into the house of God when Abiathar was High Priest and ate the bread of offering, which only the priests are allowed to eat, and he also gave some to the men who were with him». Then Jesus said to them, «The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath».

Again Jesus entered the synagogue. A man who had a paralyzed hand was there and some people watched Jesus: Would he heal the man on the Sabbath? If he did they could accuse him. Jesus said to the man with the paralyzed hand, «Stand here in the center». Then he asked them, «What does the Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill?». But they were silent. Then Jesus looked around at them with anger and deep sadness because they had closed their minds. And he said to the man, «Stretch out your hand». He stretched it out and his hand was healed. But as soon as the Pharisees left, they met with Herod's supporters, looking for a way to destroy Jesus.

«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. The Pharisees accuse, indeed, Jesus' disciples of violating the Sabbath (cf. Mk 2:24). According to their overwhelming casuistry, to pick the heads of grain means “to reap”, while crushing them in their hands signifies “to thresh”: these agricultural tasks —and some forty other— were forbidden on the Sabbath, as a day of rest. As we already know, the breads of offering the Gospel speaks of, were twelve breads that were placed every week in 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 before 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 II Vatican Council, was inspired by the previous example, and to underline that people have to prevail over economic and social questions, says: «Social order and its progressive development have to subordinate always to persons' welfare, because things are made for man and not the other way round. The Lord pointed it out already when He said the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (cf. Mk 2:27)».

Saint Augustine also says: «Love and do as you please». Have you understood it well or are you still under the obsession secondary things 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 it because we have to or because of our love for God? If only these considerations may 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.