*Observe the Sabbath day by* *keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.* Deut. 5:12-15

*One Sabbath He was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way His disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to Him: “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” And He said to them: “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?” Then He said to them: “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Again, He entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They were watching Him to see whether He would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand: “Come forward.” Then He said to them: “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; He was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man: “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against Him, how to kill Him.*

Mark 2:23-3:6

*The heavy weight champion in boxing, had taken a seat on a plane which was starting to taxi down the runway for takeoff. The flight attendant walked by and noticed he did not have on his seatbelt, and she said: “Please fasten your seatbelt, sir.”*

*The “Champ” looked up proudly and snapped: “Superman don’t need no seatbelt.”*

*Without hesitation she stared at him and said: “Superman don’t need no plane.”*

Keep It Holy

1. Henry Ford is attributed to coming up with an idea of a 40-hour workweek, and credited with this comment: *“Our newest model would have been on a market four months ago if we would not work on Sundays. These extra days of work made our people so tired that they lost their productivity.”* Whether he said these words or not I am not certain, but the 40-hour workweek was indeed his invention, but not for the reason we would consider. As an entrepreneur he realized that if the companies were to make a profit, the people had to buy their products, and for that they would need more time to relax, to enjoy themselves and to have time to shop, but this would have been accomplished only by having more time off work. Today, the medical science specifies that according to biology, humans, as well as all the other species, have a natural, rising and falling body energy patterns, and to be most productive in anything we may do, we need to keep in sync with our *“biological clock.”* That clock indicates that without substantial periods of resting, we lose productivity on every level and increase our stress.

2. The concept of the day of rest is actually found in all the cultures within all the centuries of the world’s history, although it was not always truly implemented and practiced. I am certain that all of us would agree that at least one day a week is needed to restore and to physically, mentally and spiritually, regenerate our bodies, minds, and spirits, and be able, after the five or six hard days of work, to recover our strength. The importance of the *“day of rest”* is not however a concept created by Henry Ford, nor is the creation of the modern psychology, although it is the modern society that enforces this concept, at least on the surface. This concept reaches way back, to the time of creation, *(Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.* Genesis 2:3*),* but as a rule has been taught to the people from the day of delivery of *“Ten Commandments”* by Moses to the Hebrews. I realize that in certain cases, it is very difficult to fully practice the concept of rest because of the responsibilities one may have, and sometimes the time of rest must be postponed, but nevertheless, it must, sooner or later come. As a pastor of the rural churches in the past, I learned that farmers who keep livestock cannot afford to take a full day of rest because the animals need to be tended every single day, but even these farmers need to find the time to rest.

3. The Scriptures commands us: *“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”* But, what does it mean: *“Keep it holy?”* In some denominations, this means there is no work on Sunday, not at all and the meals are to be prepared a day before, the laundry ironed and folded a day before, and the shoes to be *“spick-and-spanned”* a day before. In Jesus’ days, according to the teachings of Judaism, carrying anything heavier that a dry fig on Sabbath, was considered *“work,”* therefore forbidden. *“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy,”* the Mosaic Law declared.Ironically, what is my most demanding *“working day”* as your pastor? (This was also true about the “rabbis of the Old Testament.) It is of course Sunday, and nobody can deny or question this. But technically, Sunday is not a Sabbath, thus this rule does not apply to us, Christians, some may argue today, or is it? Technically, Sabbath is the last day of the week while Sunday is the first day of a week, but to understand the importance and the meaning of Sabbath requires more than technicality.

4. In the Hebrew language, the word *“Sabbath”* means: *“to cease, to abstain, to rest, to be inactive.”* I don’t dispute the Hebrew definition, but there is much more in the importance of keeping Sabbath as a *“holy day,”* than only to refrain fromwork. Jesus’ response to the Pharisees, as indicated by Mark, shows that the interpretations of what is considered to be work and what is not, depends on the circumstances. The biblical writers were aware of the problem which may arise because of the different interpretations of Sabbath, therefore in the book of Exodus 20:8-11 we read about the need for the rest on Sabbath, for a purpose of keeping Sabbath as the *“holy observance,”* a time dedicated to God, when we express our gratitude for His blessings bestowed upon us. There is not denying that we experience God’s blessings every day, but what really is important is to be able to show our gratitude to Him. Sabbath indicates the importance of the time of worship and of praise. It is to be the *“holy, consecrated day,”* the day we need, although we may sometimes not want to admit it for many various reasons. On the contrary to what some may believe, Sabbath however is not just one day, out of seven, in which God has a chance to be with us, because He is with us always, but this is the day we set aside to consciously show our gratitude, our thanks, our indebtedness to God, and we must recognize this.

5. In a physical sense we need to restore our nervous and musculoskeletal systems, as well as our spiritual and psychological well-being. As the species we need to relax. On this one day, out of the seven days of a week, on this *“day of rest,”* we are able to drop ordinary concerns and problems of our life and regenerate our bodies, as well as our spirit, while we fellowship with others who express the same need. Let us not kid ourselves, we need social interactions, for only a very selected few are or were equipped for the life of solitude. The whole idea of the so-called: *“solitary confinement”* has been created as a form of punishment, not a pleasure. The idea of the *“spiritual retreat”* has also been created to offer us a temporary venue where we can commune with God in a very special way, but in daily life, to function productively, we need social interactions. The *“Chinese flu”* pandemic and the forced lockdowns that followed, has clearly proven this. The price of not being involved in the social interactions was and is too high a price to pay. Social isolation leads to spiritual separation and alienation, which is never positive. If you have ever experienced being overworked, whether physically or mentally, you know that our physical and mental condition deteriorates rapidly beyond certain point. This is also the case with our spiritual condition. Alienated from others and from God, leads to emptiness and depression. When tired, we become extremely weak and vulnerable. Is anything worth of this?

6. Our today’s readings not only encourage us, but clearly specify the need for our renewal, in every aspect. Keeping this one *“day holy”* offers us the opportunity to become physically, mentally and spiritually rejuvenated. The worship time offers us the means to recharge and to regain our spiritual strength by allowing us to connect with God, not only a personal, but also on a communal level. When the Hebrews left Egypt, God reminded them that they are no more slaves but they are free, and must forever to remember what God has done for them, thus as the Bible says, the commandment to celebrate Sabbath day. *“…God brought you out from there with a mighty hand…”* (Deuteronomy 26:8)and He commanded you: *“to keep the Sabbath day holy.”* (Exodus 20:8) Following the 400 years of slavery in Egypt, freed from it by God, the Hebrews were obligated to show Him their gratitude by simply observing the *“holy day of rest.”* When we accepted Jesus as our Savior; we too have become free but from the slavery to sin. Our *“freedom,”* obtained through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross of Calvary and His victory over death on the Easter morning, is as much worth to celebrate to us, as it was to the Hebrews following their Exodus, because on that Easter morning we *“exited”* our equivalent of slavery, *“slavery to sin.”* Being freed from the slavery of sin, we were charged to observe the day of the *“Resurrection”* as our *“holy day of rest, and the day of worship.”*

7. Our modern society often focuses on the need for the time of rest and in many countries the work week has been shortened to four days to offer people more time to rest, but unfortunately, at the same time, most of the people forgot about the importance of worship and of keeping God’s day *“holy.”* Regrettably, our society doesn’t understand what they lose. Without worship and without acceptance of God in their lives, people may only to be pitted, for in their arrogance and the human self-centeredness, they neither embrace God nor other people, and sooner or later they destroy themselves, physically, spiritually, mentally and morally. We see this plainly in today’s prevalent use of drugs, alcohol, sex, money and power among all the social classes of the modern society, from the elites to the poor and the desolated. They do not realize that life without God does not make any sense, and yet many of these people invent their own *“gods,”* whatever or whoever they may be. The *“American Idol”* show clearly comes to mind as just one small example. In the end, rejecting God inevitably leads to a disaster. It is like trying to defy the law of gravity by jumping off the skyscraper. Initially there might be a feeling of freedom, a sense of spaciousness, the ability to fly, with no restrains, no boundaries to follow, but then the law of gravity ends the *“freefall”* with the deadly crash. Is it worth to pay such a price for one short moment of illusioned *“freedom?”*

8. The Hebrews were to celebrate Sabbath in honor of their freedom, just as we are to celebrate Sunday as the day of our freedom, but unfortunately not many people realize this. It is in a sense unfortunate that in our language the *“day of rest,”* is the reflection of a pagan ritual and veneration of the *“sun,”* while in a number of world’s languages this day is referred to as *“God’s day,”* the *“day of rest,”* or the *“Resurrection of Jesus’ day.”* This is especially clear in some Slavic as well as Romanic languages. The book of Deuteronomy, which many scholars see as a sort of a compilation of the *“Law of Moses,”* indicates to me that today there is a great need to accept the day of Jesus’ resurrection as the day of rest and worship, as our Sabbath, our day of salvation, through acceptance of Jesus as our Christ, our Savior. I see here a clear connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament Laws, in reference to the *“day of the rest,”* that became our *“day of salvation,”* our *“holy day,”* our Sabbath; the time of worship, and the time of rest.

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