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Growing up we were often told stories of a Great-Grandfather who lived and died not far from my hometown. What most caught my attention and has stuck with me after all these years are about how he believed Sundays should be kept. He was known for refusing to drive his horse and buggy to Church, because he considered that to be too much work for the Sabbath. The family walked to church, and not only did they walk to church, but they attended three church services on most Sundays. I used to think this was extreme, given that this all took place in the 1930's and 1940's, until we visited where he lived and realized that the churches he attended were almost right across the street. The three church services are not all that excessive or unique in the history of the Church either, especially in our tradition where Sunday Morning Prayer, Mass, and Evening Prayer was once the norm.

We likely all have family members and friends with stories or definite ideas about keeping the Sabbath. These play a part when we consider acceptable activity for a Sunday and how to keep it Holy. It is interesting that of all the Ten Commandments, this fourth commandment, Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath Day is among those commandments which get interpreted in extremes. Among Christians, either the Sabbath is ignored all together and seen as just one more day of the week, or we surround the Sabbath with so many rules and denials that it evolves into a day of fasting and hardship. This is one of the many signs of how out of touch with God our world has become. But not much has changed, for in Jesus' day the Sabbath was a day of fasting and abstinence. There were one hundred and fifty-three regulations which spelled out what constituted working on the Sabbath. The regulations were so varying and detailed that the Sabbath had gone from being a day of rest and stillness to a day spent worrying about violating one jot or tittle of the Law or another.

Jesus challenges this all in this morning's Gospel. He illustrates the truth the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. This is the truth that Jesus is continually driving home to the Rabbis, Scribes, and Pharisees. This becomes a point of tension in Jesus' earthly ministry because Jesus has an affinity for healing on the Sabbath. And every time He works a miracle on the Sabbath, just as we read in today's Gospel, the Rabbis, scribes, or Pharisees cry foul and accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath and one of the Ten Commandments. The Scriptures teach that the Sabbath is to be a day of rest. Jesus heals on the sabbath to drive home the point that the Sabbath is not just a day of rest, but a day of holiness, healing, and

redemption. The Sabbath is intended to be a day of restoration, and what better way to show this than to restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and health to the sick.

In our Gospel lesson this morning we find that Jesus has been invited to a Sabbath meal at the house of one of the chief Pharisees. Jesus knew that a Sabbath meal probably meant there would be more on the menu than bread. As he walked into the Pharisee's house, he nearly fell over a man who was plagued with swelling, or water retention, what the King James calls the dropsy. Interestingly, this fellow with the dropsy, with swelling, is a symbol of pride. The man's physical swelling is analogous to the Pharisee's spiritual swelling of pride. But the Pharisees have not brought this man into contact with Jesus out of mercy. Jesus' religious enemies, who have also been invited to the party, are conducting a cruel experiment, watching to see what He will do. Never one to pass up a moment of high drama, Jesus looks over at them and asks, is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? They give no answer. If they said, "Yes," they might be accused of encouraging Jesus to break their own Sabbath regulations. If they said, "No," they would look even more heartless than they probably were.

Jesus does not wait around for any further debate. He heals the man and lets him go. Then he points out the hypocrisy of his self-appointed judges by saying, You won't tell me if it is lawful to restore a human being to health on a Sabbath, but you know perfectly well that if you go home this afternoon, and you find one of your prize animals has fallen into a ditch, you are going to haul him out, and you are not going to stop to ask yourself what day of the week it is. Jesus accuses them of valuing the wellbeing of their livestock over the wellbeing of a fellow human. So much for keeping the Sabbath holy. We might wonder what Jesus really thought as He then watched the other guests climb all over each other for the best seat at the table, preferably as close to the host as possible. Jesus recognizes that the dinner party needs a good dose of humility and begins to tell a parable in which humility is the moral of the story.

It takes humility to keep a holy sabbath and to keep ourselves holy. St. John Vianney, the simple and holy French priest who would one day become the patron saint of all priests once preached to his parish, *It takes humility to recognize that Man is not only a work horse but is also a spirit created in the image of God! He has not only material needs and basic appetites but needs of the soul and appetites of the heart. He lives not only by bread, but by prayer, faith, adoration, and love. It takes humility to weigh every thought and action to the*

*glory of God.* A good rule of thumb is to ask ourselves if what I plan to do on the Sabbath going to glorify God, going to bring a sense of wholeness, is it going to facilitate fulfilling rest at the end of the day with a clean conscience. But isn't this how we are supposed to live every day, humbly and with God in mind? St. John Vianney writes, *Yes, dear brethren, let us practice this beautiful virtue. It will unite us to God; it will let us live at peace with our neighbors; it will make the cross less heavy; it will give us the blessed hope of seeing God in heaven. He, himself, tells us this: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see God!" This it is that I wish for you all. Amen.*