



*"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you*

*shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it"* (Exodus 20:8-11).

I find myself most at peace during the Holy and Divine Liturgy on any day of the week, but exceedingly so much more on Sundays. Although difficult for some to integrate the Sabbath into a day of rest, we must honor this day for what it purposes. When we are at rest—free of worries of impending work and executing tasks, we seem to bring forth our most faithful of intentions, spiritual contentment,

and completeness, just by abiding in worship in the House of our Lord.

In man's restful state of awareness, it is without difficulty to offer one's best, pray more earnestly and fervently, and to give of oneself more freely and willingly. This brings to mind the angels of heaven—how effortlessly they move about the heavens with wings of soundless motion—worshiping the Lord our God with exaltation and perfection.

Setting aside a specified holy day of rest mindfully embraces many valuable things, such as quality time for the family, individual preparedness for each person, and willingness to be hospitable to strangers.

"But, on the Seventh Day (i.e. the same day repeated seven times, which number is also a perfect one, though for another reason), the rest of God is set forth, and then, too we first hear of it's being hallowed. So that God did not wish to hallow this day by His perfect works but by His rest" (St. Augustine: The City of God, Chapter 31).

**[1] The Sabbath Day—as a Holy Day acknowledged by the Coptic Orthodox Church should be a designated family day.** As much as it is possible, the family should ride together to church and not in separate vehicles. Groaning about the length of the Divine Liturgy

should not be the discourse, but rather praising the Divine Liturgy for its value and significance to the soul. It is ironic that the Divine Liturgy generally lasts about one third less of the length of a work day, and yet, no one complains they work eight hours or even twelve hours per day, but rather some count the minutes and seconds of the Divine Liturgy. They neglect that this holy day is the utmost reason for restfulness as a state of mind.

As a gathering together, families need to attend church in one accord. No one enters into the church just as an individual, but as a member of a group in pilgrimage together towards the kingdom of heaven. The family enters the church together, bows before the holy altar, makes the sign of the cross, and continues in prayers as they sit accordingly—females and males. There should be no disagreement in spirit and no conflict of any nature, but each one should lovingly look upon the other with gentleness and kindness.

The Sabbath Day is abiding in God's holy church together in harmony, and then leaving together in harmony. There should be no hurrying out of church for housework, homework, or yard work. There is no need to rush to work on a home project or to go to the office. If the Lord our God Himself designed this particular day—as a special day of rest, then we must

do our best to follow His "dividing of the waters" of the days of the week.

**[2] The Sabbath Day is a day in which we must be cognizant of God's glory and put the magnificence of our Lord and His great and splendid work before our eyes.** How can we do this if we are unprepared and untimely? The focus of the Sabbath Day is being our best and seeking the goodness of what propels us to eternity. Along with the blessings of being Coptic Orthodox and its honors, come paramount responsibilities. We must prepare ourselves prayerfully and physically for the Divine Liturgy. Yearn to enter the holy church with reverence, participate in the Divine Liturgy, and partake of the Holy Mysteries with gratitude.

Do you wake up early enough to pray and enter into the church promptly while in its serenity and quietness or do you arrive immediately before the Holy Gospel is read feeling justified that you can partake of the Holy Mysteries or do you just enter whenever and disturb the peacefulness of others around you?

I once overheard an elderly bishop say that when you enter the church immediately before the Holy Gospel is read, it is similar to going to visit a friend and arrive when the meal is being served. You are

sending a clear message—to eat and have little respect for the master of the home and for his family's love and labor who prepared a wonderful meal just for you.

The Divine Liturgy has far surpassed the test of time and many have lost their lives and shed blood for the church that has toiled painstakingly to preserve the faith. It is God's gift that continues to be a fountain of living water through His holy body and blood, yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

What happens to someone for being habitually late to work each day? The person will be terminated. What happens to the person who arrives early, works harder, and accomplishes more? The person will be rewarded. Perhaps this person will be promoted, elevated in rank, and win the respect of colleagues and administrators. Should we give less to our Lord? Are common excuses, such as these, really acceptable in our understanding of salvation and God's love for us? "I am tired from working all week and needed to sleep a little later"; or "I have to drive 30 minutes and traffic is really bad every time I start heading out for church."

Not only should we be prepared inwardly, but also equipped outwardly as well. When I think of angels robed in white apparel, I am assured that there is a

message there. The angels are never depicted as casually attired. I cannot imagine an angel dressed purposely in torn clothes with holes on their garments, or wearing shorts and sleeveless coverings. Surely, they are clothed in their finest chaste garments in the presence of our Lord. What then do you perceive is the real difference here when some people step forward to partake of Holy Communion? Can we agree that the sense of negligence about the outward appearance before the Lord alludes to a disregard to His holy presence in the Holy Communion?

**[3] As Coptic Orthodox people, observing the Sabbath Day demonstrates our desire to share the love we have for God and our beloved church with others.** It amazes me that our church is not being flooded with more interest from communities in which our churches are built. I am often reminded of a hymn about the Samaritan Woman that I think is befitting:

"The disciples went to town to buy food, a journey ahead, of a whole day to go.

Jesus looked up by the well nearby a woman from Samaria coming He saw.

She was carrying a pail to draw water with from the well, as she did every day.

Jesus asked her if she would give Him water to

quench His thirst away.

Blessed are those who have mercy, who give to the  
poor, and fast and pray.

The Holy Spirit will fill their hearts the Son will show  
them

mercy on Judgment Day" (Melodies of the  
Distribution of the Holy Mysteries).

Do we greet those who are unfamiliar to us in church  
and welcome them to the Divine Liturgy? Do we  
speak in the country's language so that all can  
participate and understand?

A new American convert quietly asked me, "Many  
come here from Egypt and take part in the United  
States employment, housing, schools, and  
universities. They take part in the social security  
program, disability rights, and political forums.  
Many insist the United States protects the Christians  
in Egypt. Why then, do they want to pray, chant  
hymns, and teach Sunday Schools in Arabic?"

As with all waves of immigration and the spread of  
Coptic Orthodoxy throughout the world, we have  
examples of the apostles and disciples. We know that  
they spoke in the languages of diverse lands. We  
know that Coptic Orthodoxy was not developed in  
the creation of the world during the first six days of

life. Rather, our faith came to us through the divine blessing of the Holy Family's Flight into Egypt, and later the arrival and martyrdom of St. Mark the Evangelist. The Tower of Babel taught us that when different languages are spoken, divisions of people ensue with chaos.

The mother church and our land of origin that gave us spirituality and monasticism will always strive for the preservation of our beloved Coptic language, hymns, and doxologies. The movement of our Coptic Church to other lands must be energized to achieve the most important task of evangelism throughout the world. It is incumbent upon us to spread Coptic Orthodoxy and welcome all who diligently seek the truth. The Lord Jesus Christ will reveal Himself to these seekers through this blessed church.

God created all and our Lord Jesus Christ died for all. Our Lord Jesus Christ evangelized a thief with His last breath of life. It must have been in the language the thief understood or how could the thief have received such healing and salvation that compelled him to repent and believe?

God created every human being and that is what we celebrate in the Divine Liturgy. With contemplation, rest, and prayer upon our lips, we celebrate life on our Sabbath Day and thank our loving God who gave



His life for us. Since the first century, Christians made Sunday the Christian Sabbath and kept Saturday as the Jewish Sabbath. [More will be addressed regarding the Sabbath as the first day of the week in the articles to come, "Lord of the Sabbath" and "The Second Sabbath".]

"For rest is in the whole i.e. in perfect completeness, while in the part there is labor. And thus, we labor as long as we know in part; 'but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.'" (St. Augustine: The City of God, Chapter 31).

In summary, the Sabbath is a holy day of rest from the world and should be used as the giving of thanks to the Lord for all His gifts with which He benevolently bestows upon us. A sign of deliverance and a sign of rest, may we all remember the six days of creation, and the Creator's example of our need for reverence of HIS hallowed and holy work.

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