

Session Three



Keeping Time with God

Remember us, O God; from age to age, be our comforter. You have given us the wonder of time, blessings in days and nights, seasons and years. Bless us, your children, and fill our days with the bright hope that is ours in the coming of Christ. You are our God, living and reigning, for ever and ever. Amen.

STEP 1: HOME PREPARATION

KEY SCRIPTURE



“Speak to the Israelites and tell them: The following are the festivals of the LORD, which you shall declare holy days. These are my festivals.”

— **Leviticus 23:2, NAB**

The Church is so wise to lead us into special times of deliberate preparation and worship that commemorate the events of salvation history. Penitential seasons make our joyful celebrations of Jesus and his resurrection even more significant, more thoughtful, and more meaningful. Whose great idea was the liturgical year? It was God’s!

On a weekly and annual basis, God specified exactly how he wanted his people to “keep time” by giving them feast days that revolved around the Tabernacle. These special celebrations, which always included rest, offerings, and a sacred assembly, helped the people remember and “re-participate” in the important events in their history with God.

1 In addition to a tabernacle, proper worship was meant to include a liturgical schedule, solemn ceremonies, and vivid rituals. Turn to **Leviticus 23**. Using the chapter and paragraph headings in bold print in your Bible, list the seven feasts that God established.

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 6. |
| 3. | 7. |
| 4. | |

Note: The other sacred times in the Old Testament liturgical year are presented in the *Fulfilled* book. To keep it simple, we will only look at one of them in detail in this session.

SABBATH

The Sabbath was the basis of sacred time for the people that included a weekly gathering, offering, worship, and rest. All the other feasts were expanded sabbaths. The word *sabbath* means “to rest.” **Exodus 31:12-18** is something like an elaboration on the third commandment; read through it now.

2 Of what did God intend the commandment to keep the Sabbath to be a sign and a remembrance of (see verses 13, 17)?

3 In most Bible translations, the term “sanctify” is used in verse 13, meaning “to dedicate or to make holy.” A hint of what this means is indicated in the first use of the number seven in this study, which we will see repeated many times throughout. In biblical numerology, seven is the number of divine perfection or completion. It is the covenant number, as is pointed out in verse 16.

What do you think covenant-making, Creation, and Sabbath-keeping have to do with one another? You may want to read **CCC 347–348** for help with this question.

Perhaps while they rested on the Sabbath, Old Testament sages loved making poetry describing creation. As did all people for most of human history, they lived closer to nature than most of us do, and Jewish wisdom always used the term “creation” when referring to nature as an expression of faith.

4 In **Psalm 104**, the poet uses a special metaphor for Creation, a metaphor that became part of the whole Jewish understanding for it. Can you discern what it is? How was Creation a sort of “home building”?

5 Does God really need to rest? Why do you think God created in seven “days” rather than one?

God
is always
working,
yet always
at rest.

6

Comparing the following passages will help you see how the Old Testament liturgical schedule based on the Sabbath relates specifically to the building of the Tabernacle. Read the following Scripture verses and make note of any similarities:

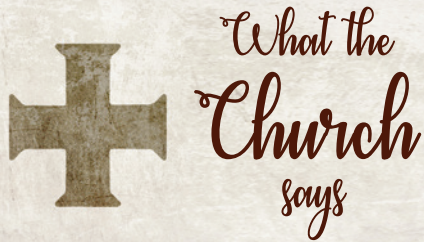
Genesis 1:31 and Exodus 39:43:

Genesis 2:1 and Exodus 39:32:

Genesis 2:2 and Exodus 40:33:

Genesis 2:3 and Exodus 39:43:

Genesis 2:3 and Exodus 40:9:



“It is not the Old Testament that is abolished in Christ but the concealing veil, so that it may be understood through Christ.”

— **St. Augustine**



7 Why is it interesting that the consecration of the Old Testament Tabernacle took seven days?

8 Now you should be able to explain why **Exodus 31:17** says the Sabbath “sign” is to be observed as a perpetual covenant. Why is this so?

Forever does not mean only “until Jesus comes.” And *forever* does not mean just “until the New Testament.” It means *forever*.

9 When the Bible talks about the Sabbath, it remembers Creation, when God “worked” for six days and “rested” on the seventh. Turn to **Deuteronomy 5:15**. There is another important event associated with the Sabbath. What does this new information add to your understanding of the Sabbath?



The
Sabbath
contained
an inherent
blessing
by which
its keepers
“lived.”

This is why the Sabbath was part of the ceremonial law of the Old Testament: It was a “remembrance” of Israel’s redemption from Egyptian slavery. But “remembrance” or “commemoration” in Jewish thought was not simply a happy reminder; it was a “re-participation” of the historical event, a way of being present as the communion of God’s people in the original Exodus and Passover from that time forward in Jewish history.

- 10 The practices associated with proper Sabbath-keeping were rest and worship. If the people observed one but not the other, had they “kept” the Sabbath with God? Why, or why not?

BREAKING THE SABBATH

God’s people were slaves again, this time to Babylon. The book of Nehemiah is about a man who felt burdened to restore the city of God, Jerusalem, to its proper place of glory and honor. That meant rebuilding the city, the Temple, and the wall around it. About a hundred years before, the Babylonians had destroyed the Holy City and taken the Jews captive, leaving the permanent “Tabernacle” built later in Jewish history (Solomon’s Temple) in ruins. **Nehemiah 13:15-22** and **2 Chronicles 36:15-21** give us clarity on these events in Israel’s history. Read through the two passages and answer the following questions:

- 11 What was the reason for the Babylonian captivity according to these passages?
- 12 What does it typically mean “to profane” something? What does profaning the Sabbath, mentioned specifically in **Nehemiah 13:18**, mean in the context of these passages?

- 13 How long were the people in bondage to Babylon (see 2 Chronicles 36:21)? Do you find this significant in any way? Explain.

BLESSINGS OF THE SABBATH

- 14 Savoring the following Scripture verses will inspire and draw you into the heart of the Sabbath. This is important because the Sabbath was the basis of all the other Old Testament liturgical feasts. Look up each passage and make a note of what you learn in each one. If you do not understand something, make a note to discuss it with your group.

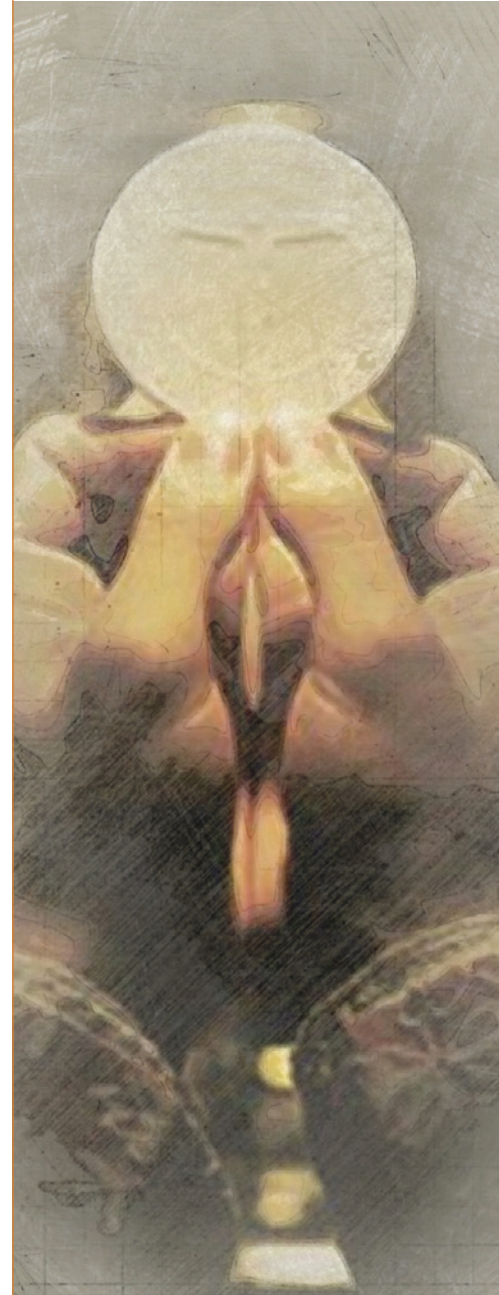
Isaiah 56:2:

Isaiah 56:4-5:

Isaiah 56:6-7:

Isaiah 58:13-14:

Ezekiel 20:11-16, 26:



“Rest”
is both
physical
and
spiritual.

FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY

15 The Sabbath was a time set aside each week, every Saturday, for worship: to recall God’s work and rest in Creation and his rescue of the people from Egyptian slavery. At the end of a grueling work week, is the Sabbath a luxury? A boring rule? Or a gift? Read **Mark 2:27**. For whom was the Sabbath made?

16 Having studied the types of law in the Old Testament in the Session One video, explain why Christians no longer keep the Old Testament Sabbath (i.e., Saturday), but observe Sunday instead? If you need help or want additional insights, see CCC 349.

17 Today, we no longer “keep the Sabbath.” According to St. John in **Revelation 1:10**, what did the apostles call it?

18 Read through **Hebrews 4:1-10** to find out why the Church keeps time with God by observing a Sunday obligation until the end of time. According to verse 10, whose “rest” is Sunday?

The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life. “Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church” (CCC 2177).¹

Our daily works continue God’s work in Creation. Therefore, like him, we also rest. Sunday and work are not opposites; they complement one another. Sunday is the happy crown of our work week.

¹ CIC, can. 1246 § 1.

19 Our Sunday reflects the Sabbath feast, a day of obligation that includes worship and rest, so that part of worship *is* rest, and part of rest *is* worship. Have you ever thought of rest and worship as so interrelated? Explain.

20 Does this thought change your perception of worship at all? How?

God often uses the “workplaces” of our daily lives as a primary tool for our spiritual formation. Sunday reorients us to what God is doing, rather than what we have been doing. The interruption of work that Sunday allows gives us time to consider how God has worked in us and through us in the past week.

Recalling Jesus’ work of the Cross, we can participate in that supreme work by receiving the Eucharist and by offering our own duties and labors in communion with his. Even if we must work on Sunday, like our pastors do, Sunday worship remains an obligation. We can set aside another day every week for rest.

Sunday replaces the Old Testament Sabbath by fulfilling the rhythm and spirit of God’s command. It is similar to the Sabbath, but not the same. The Sabbath ceremonially commemorated the Exodus, the saving event of salvation history for the Israelites. Because there was no grace in it, their Sabbath worship and rest could not communicate the truer, spiritual rest we enjoy in, with, and through Christ. Jesus *is* our rest. Our perpetual, weekly Sunday observance includes rest, worship, and remembrance of God’s saving actions on our behalf in Christ. As such, “Sunday is the ‘foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year’” (CCC 1193).²

In summary, the Old Testament Sabbath feast was the basis of the Old Testament liturgical year, establishing a weekly day of obligation that included rest, worship, and remembrance. The Sabbath foreshadowed our own Sunday.

“In returning and rest you shall be saved.”

— **Isaiah 30:15**



² SC 106.

KEY SCRIPTURE



*“ Repent, therefore,
and turn again,
that your sins may
be blotted out,
that times of
refreshing may
come from the
presence of
the Lord. ”*

— **Acts 3:19**

From the time of the Mosaic law, the People of God have observed fixed feasts, beginning with Passover, to commemorate the astonishing actions of the Savior God, to give him thanks for them, to perpetuate their remembrance, and to teach new generations to conform their conduct to them. In the age of the Church, between the Passover of Christ already accomplished once for all, and its consummation in the kingdom of God, the liturgy celebrated on fixed days bears the imprint of the newness of the mystery of Christ (CCC 1163-1164).

LET'S REVIEW

The Catholic Church has a liturgical year because:

- The Old Testament liturgical schedule was established by God and centered around the Tabernacle, foreshadowing our Church's liturgical year.
- Through the Old Testament Sabbath, God indicated his perpetual desire that man rest and worship together in imitation of his own Sabbath rest and to look forward to our final, heavenly rest.
- The Church's feast days are days of obligation, like those of the Old Testament, that include rest, worship, offerings, and gathering of God's people.
- Through our holy days, especially Sunday and Easter, we participate in the heavenly liturgy and communion feast.
- At Mass, we connect with the angels and the saints who are already celebrating in heaven.
- Our liturgical calendar points us to heaven, in which we will ultimately worship in communion forever with Jesus.
- We cannot live in the closest possible relationship with God if our time is not centered and ordered in him and his Church.

Amen! It was this sense of connectedness to past, present, and future saints that made my first Easter as a Catholic so meaningful to me. Even now, the Catholic liturgical calendar keeps us all joined to the communion and celebrations occurring in heaven.

YOU ARE NOW READY FOR THE **SESSION THREE VIDEO**.

STEP 2: VIDEO PRESENTATION

Session Three: Keeping Time with God

- History exists within the context of the Church, not the Church in the context of history (as afterthought)
- Feasts are always forward-looking.
- Spring feasts
- Fall feasts
- New year begins
- Each of us individually follows Jesus through this template.
- The Church follows Jesus through this template.
- Application: Observing Catholic holy days of obligation with deliberation and awareness keeps me in time with God and “in” the body of Christ as I journey through my life, and the church journeys through history.



STEP 3: SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

INVITATION

Like the Israelites in the Old Testament, Catholics relive the action of God in history every year through the liturgical year. We “re-present” the Gospel from Christ’s incarnation and birth, to his passion, ascension, and reign.

In spring, he enters the world in Mary's immaculate womb; in winter, he is born, circumcised, and named. He is raised in the Holy Family and meets his cousin John. He goes into the desert, and we go with him, during Lent. We follow him through his passion, which is soon vanquished by his resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. Now he reigns, and we await his second coming as we prepare to celebrate his first coming again.

Then the cycle begins again, like a wheel that has been spinning for two millennia. When we participate in this spiral of remembrance and anticipation by celebrating the feasts of the Church, God lives intimately in time and history with us.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

God Prompt - LOVE the Word™

L **LISTEN:** “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you” (Exodus 31:13).

O **OBSERVE:** What is the most significant statement or Scripture you read today?

Do you desire refreshing from the Lord? In what area of your life do you need his rest?

How has God spoken to you in this session about how you treat Sundays and other holy days?

What steps can you take to make Sunday a more holy day, a day of rest for yourself and your family?

V **VERBALIZE:** Lord, you have shown me that my primary challenge about Sunday obligation is ...

Lord, I sense you calling me to a more restful, reverent Sunday. In all honesty, I am probably experiencing very little mental, emotional, and spiritual rest because I rest and worship so little on Sundays. One way I commit to making my Sundays more restful and worshipful is by ...

E **ENTRUST:** *Lord, I believe it is your desire to be present with us in all of our work and rest, and in all of our days, weeks, and years. Help us make your holy days more holy, especially by being faithful in gathering at Church and giving our souls a Sunday. We commit these feasts more carefully to you, and we thank you for the gift of rest!*

