

Fourth Sunday of Lent 2024 B TV

The Book of Genesis tells us that when the work of creation was completed, God rested on the 7th day – the origin of the Jewish Sabbath still observed today. God’s rest was not because He was tired, but because He was ***finished*** – harmony and order had arranged the original chaos into a suitable and balanced world as a home to all that had been created. This is why Jesus says the Sabbath is made for us, not us for the Sabbath – so we can keep our balance. Since the first days of Christian faith, of course, we celebrate the Sabbath not on the seventh day – Saturday – but on Sunday and its evening vigil, because this is the Lord’s Day, the Day of the Resurrection, the first day of the New Creation, the assurance that time does not just run in recurrent circles but is moving to fulfillment of perfect life with God.

So the day of rest is less about taking a breather so we can head back to work, and more about regularly re-ordering our lives to keep chaos from taking over again. ***Week by week, God calls us to restore faith, family, and relationships to their proper focus.*** Kindnesses given and received here lift us beyond life as a wearisome, endlessly repeating cycle of work and problems to recognize God’s hand leading us to joy.

We don’t know who wrote the Books of Chronicles around 400 B.C. But as we see even in the few verses today, for the Chronicler, Israel had lost its power as a nation because God was taken for granted, living as if a relationship with God did not really matter, and took no effort on their part. The Chronicler sees the fall of Jerusalem as the consequence of this indifference and neglect of the Covenant. This is the context of that striking phrase: ***“Until the land has retrieved its lost Sabbaths, it shall have rest while the time is fulfilled.”*** This image certainly speaks to today’s world. But we can hear it closer to home, in our own spiritual lives. ***What does Sunday mean for me? Are there lost Sabbaths in my relationship with God?***

Life’s routines can easily make us exhausted or self-absorbed ... irritable, crabby, impatient. There needs to be some room for re-creation, to relax and cultivate our non-work interests and skills. But if my Sundays are just like every other day in my week, where faith, family, and relationships take a back seat,

then I have lost a Sabbath. No matter what we tell ourselves, we will experience this loss with less patience and sensitivity to others, and a lack of balance in our lives.

We spend this time in prayer and in the presence of Jesus, NOT so we can do something for God, ***but so that God can do something for us.*** Here, we look with humble faith to Jesus, the One Who literally rested in death on the 7th day, Holy Saturday, with the work of redemption completed, and then was lifted up – lifted up three times after His falls on the road to Calvary; lifted up in Crucifixion; lifted up in Resurrection; lifted up beyond our sight in the Ascension, lifted up for others to see when we do those good works that God has prepared for us in advance. 1600 years ago, St. Augustine said it in words that remain perennially true: ***“You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”*** Take this Sabbath rest to lift up Jesus in your life today; create some space for God, so God can do something new for you.