

Ecce Homo
Easter Sunday (B)
(Jn 20:1--9)

“*On the first day of the week...*” (Jn 20:1)

Christians no longer “*Keep Holy the Sabbath*” as commanded by God in the Old Testament. Sabbath = Seventh Day = Saturday. Instead, we keep holy “The Lord’s Day,” also known as “Sunday,” which is the First Day of the Week. The reason for this is the Resurrection.

When God first created the world in seven great biblical days, His work culminated on the sixth day with the creation of man, and then God “rested” on the seventh day, commanding man to imitate Him in his earthly life, working hard for six days each week, and then “resting” from his labor on the seventh. When God “rested” it does not mean He was tired from the work (God is all-powerful and does not grow tired). It means He *enjoyed* and took delight in the fruit of His work. Man is able to participate in God’s rest by offering Him praise and glory on behalf of all the creation. Initially, creation was filled with God’s glory, particularly in man, and God’s delight was immense.

But then something took place that prevented God from fully enjoying His creation. Sin entered the world. Darkness marred the glory. Above all, the shadow of death brought fear and corruption. Creation became subject to the devil, prince of darkness and lord of death, not life.

Even though God commanded man to continue keeping holy the Sabbath, it was more of a penance than a source of delight. The truth is, God no longer had His original Sabbath due to sin; God could not “rest” in the work of His hands anymore, as long as creation groaned under the burden of evil, and as long as man was subject to the tyranny of sin and death.

Therefore God undertook a new “work,” the Redemption. He undertook it personally by means of the Incarnation, entering His own creation to take upon Himself, in the person of His Son, the weight of sin, and the darkness of death.

This new “work” was accomplished in the week we just celebrated, “Holy Week.” What began in glory on the first day, Palm Sunday, ended in the darkness of death on the sixth day, Good Friday. “*Ecce homo*” (Jn 19:5), behold Man, originally created in glory, now marred beyond all recognition in the crucifixion: “*so marred was his look beyond human semblance and his appearance beyond that of the sons of man*” (Is 52:14). The seventh day of this Holy Week was the final sabbath of the Old Testament. Creation returned to darkness, “*which covered the whole land until three in the afternoon*” (Mk 15:33), and Man ended his life in death, as his soul descended into hell, into the dark “underworld” of Sheol.

Thus it is that Christians no longer keep holy the Sabbath. There is none. We keep holy the “Lord’s Day,” which is the first day of the new week, on which Christ rose. One day we will keep holy again the Sabbath, when at the Resurrection of the just there will be a new heaven and earth, where there will be no sin or evil, where the devil and his minions will be sealed up forever in a sea of fire, and death will be no more. But for now we can keep holy only the first day of this final great biblical week. *“This is the Day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it”* (Ps 118:24).

The final week has parallels with the original seven days of creation. Just as God began the heavens and the earth by speaking His word, *“Let there be light”* (Gn 1:3), so God sent forth His Eternal Word to begin a new creation. This Word, which is Light and Life, came forth in the darkness of the Holy Saturday death, profoundly celebrated in the great Easter Vigil of the Catholic Church.

The Resurrection is not Jesus “returning to life” (the way he restored Lazarus to life). It is the manifestation of Life in an entirely new and higher way for man. It is the beginning of a new order of creation, related to and incorporating the old, but new and different.

There is also a significant way the final seven days differ from the first. Whereas God began the creation with the heavens and earth, the sea and sky, the animals and plants, and culminated His work with man; in the New Creation He begins with *man*, and only in the end will it finally incorporate also nature and the cosmos.

The New Creation begins with Baptism which entirely regenerates the soul of man, infusing it with the deathless life of Christ in his Resurrection. From man’s soul the grace of the Resurrection then radiates to his body, and even to the world around him, as can be seen in the many miracles associated with saints: healings, incorruption of the body following death, taming of wild beasts, conquering of sin, harmony with fellow man and nature, Eucharistic miracles...

2000 human years after the Resurrection, it is not clear how the final seven days are progressing, whether we are still in the first day, or already in the sixth. But inexorably God is bringing His great work to completion, so that man might again be able to praise and glorify Him in the flesh, free from sin, darkness, and death.

It is toward this final Sabbath that we strive. In the end, Christians will be able to “Keep holy the Sabbath” and enjoy God’s rest, something made possible only by Baptism which brings man beyond the fallen world of the Old Testament into the New.